HOUSEWIVES OF EDENRISE

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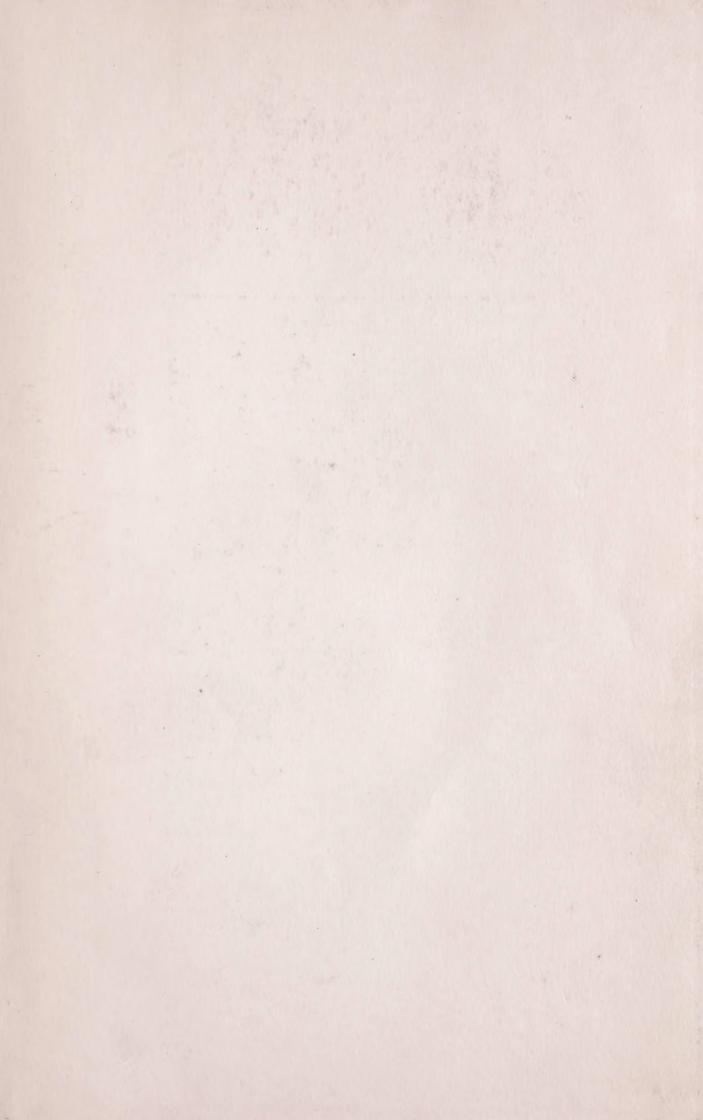


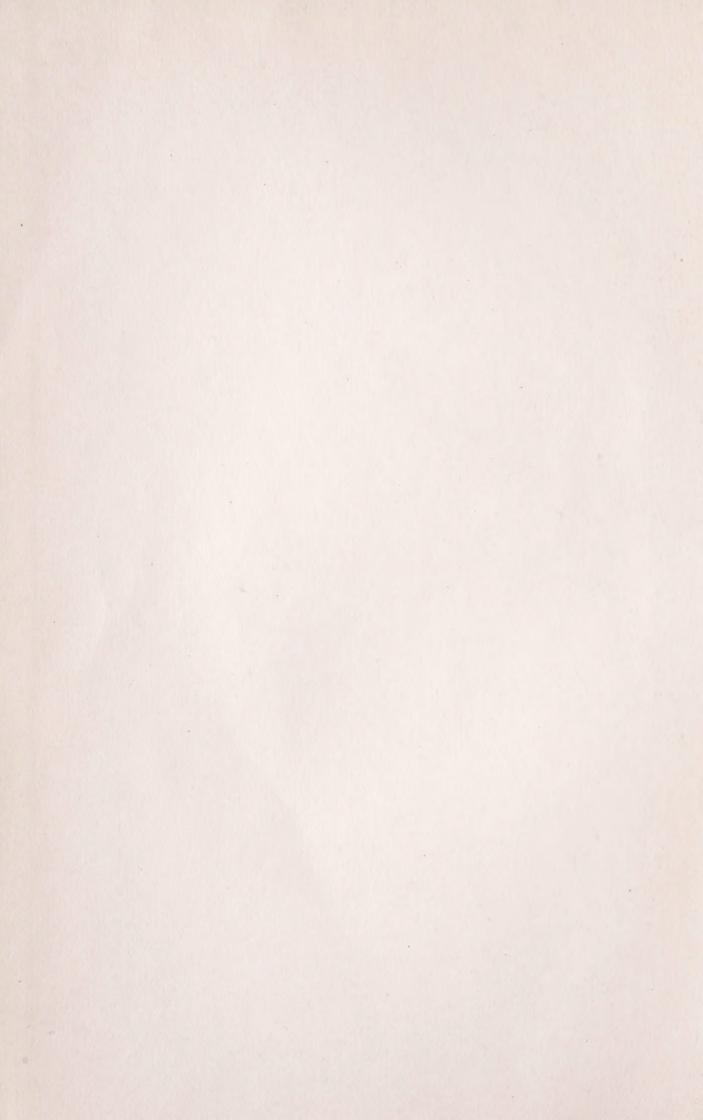
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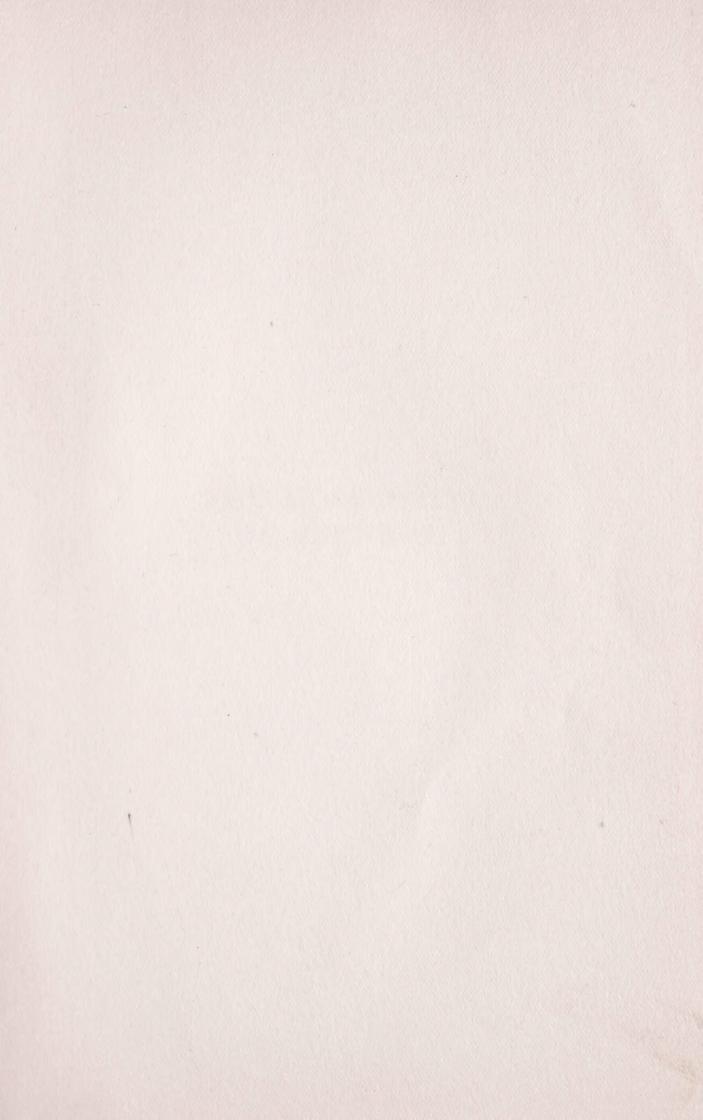
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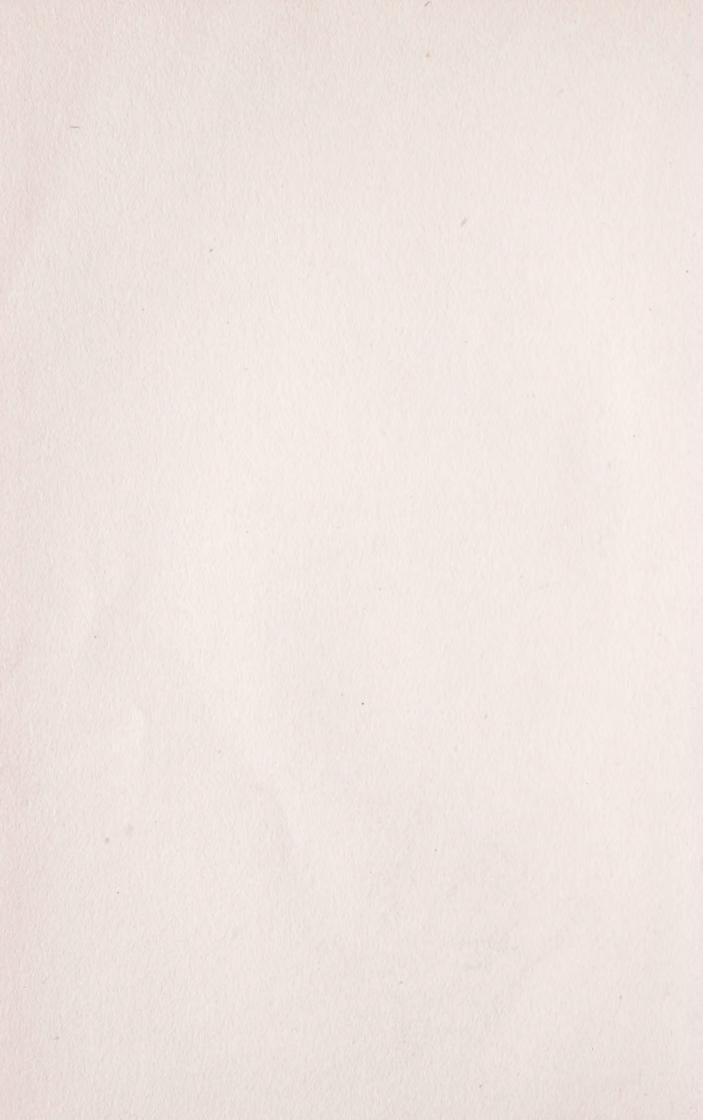
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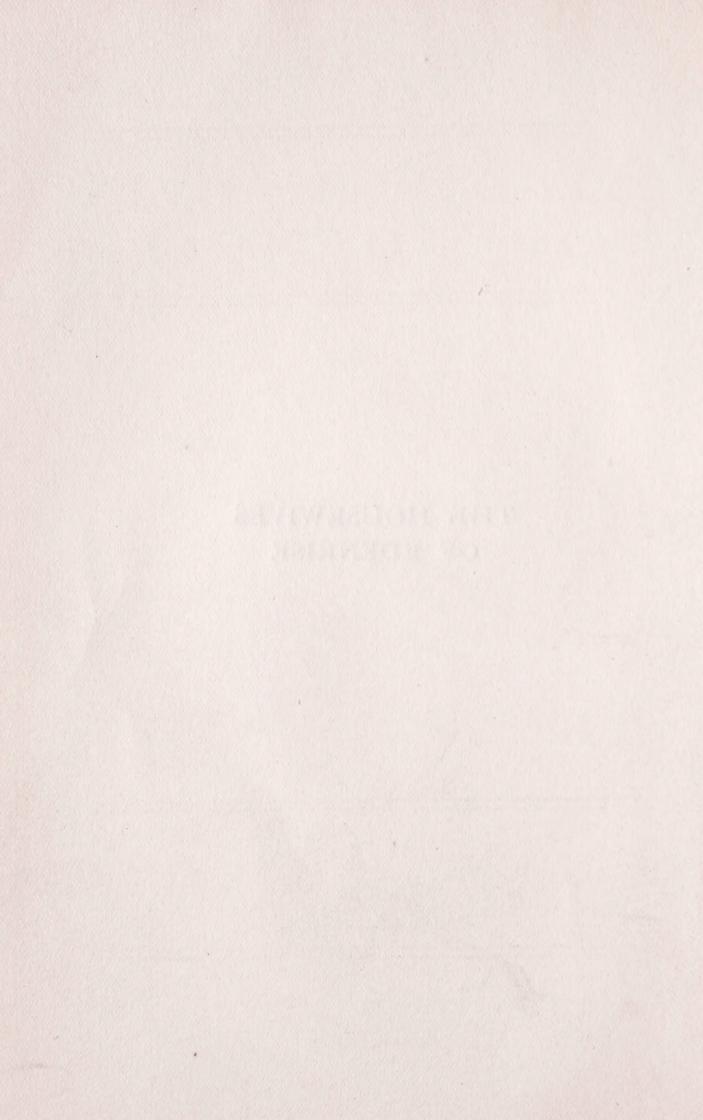








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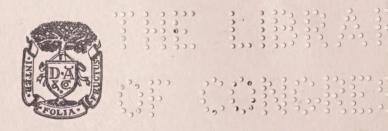


THE HOUSEWIVES OF EDENRISE

FLORENCE POPHAM

"Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng, God hath yive
To wommen kyndély whil they may lyve."

CHAUCER



NEW YORK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1902

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THE HOUSEWIVES OF EDENRISE

CHAPTER I

AN AFTERNOON CALL

"The Drawing-room, with its feeble manners and effects of curtains and embroidery, gives its tone to our lives nowadays."—Edward Carpenter.

It was Mrs. Peacock's "At Home" day, and her drawing-room—a room which is the envy of the housewives of Edenrise—was specially decked out with vases of flowers, frilled sofa-cushions, silver knick-knacks, and elegant trifles of all kinds.

Mrs. Peacock sat pouring out tea and beaming upon her little circle of friends—on Mrs. Manners, who sat on her right, large, serene, and somewhat ill-dressed; on pretty little Mrs. Welwyn, on her left, who looked a trifle conscious of her new and dainty garments; on Miss Green, the curate's sister and late Newnham student;

and on me, who took it upon myself to hand round the tea-cakes, and to replace them carefully in the fender until they should be again required.

Conversation flowed as conversation is wont to do on such occasions. Mrs. Peacock compared notes with Mrs. Welwyn as to the height, weight, and size of her little three-year-old girl, and tried not to display too much triumph on finding that her child was two inches taller and three inches larger round than Mrs. Welwyn's.

"However," she said modestly, "I do not think that it is always the finest children who are the strongest."

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Mrs. Manners seriously. "I am always anxious when a child of mine is really fat, especially if it gets a cold on its chest. I lost one, you know, and he was one of the finest children I ever saw."

Mrs. Welwyn looked relieved and Mrs. Peacock put on a sympathetic expression, though I know that she considers seven children—which is the number Mrs. Manners has been able to rear—somewhat excessive.

I passed the tea-cakes to Mrs. Manners and said, to change the subject:

"Do you know that the house next to

mine, 'The Glen,' is let?"

"No. You don't say so?" said Mrs. Manners. "It has been so long vacant that I had given up expecting it to be taken. I do hope you will have pleasant neighbours."

"I hope so too. I wonder what sort of person has taken it," said Mrs. Wel-

wyn.

"The chemist told me, and the house-agent told him, that it was a lady—a widow—no haggler over trifles, but young and very pleasant," said Mrs. Peacock.

"And the house is being redecorated

throughout," I remarked.

"She must be in a great hurry to get in, for as I passed the house last night, after dark, I saw that the men were working by candle-light. I just spoke to the foreman, and he asked me if I would like to look round. I suppose you have seen the inside, Mrs. Howard-Jones?" Mrs. Peacock said, turning to me.

"No, I have not, as it happens," I an-

swered, regretting that I had not made better use of my opportunities.

"Well," said Mrs. Peacock, when she saw that she had our undivided attention, "it is really being done up in style, and in a way that I believe is considered most artistic now. I don't like it myself; I shouldn't like it in my own house at all. There is a great deal of whitewash and flat picture-rails, white paint, plain walls, and a frieze of dancing-girls, green with white hair, in the drawing-room. And in the hall and dining-room, brown paper and a dado of matting."

"You don't mean ordinary brown paper like one uses to wrap parcels in?" said Mrs. Welwyn.

"Yes, I do. Perfectly ordinary brown paper, I assure you, only not such a cheerful colour as one usually sees on parcels," protested Mrs. Peacock.

"I never heard of such a thing," Mrs. Welwyn said. "It is true, though, that I wanted to have a plain-coloured paper in my drawing-room when it was done up the other day. But," she went on plaintively, "Stapleford's young man said plain papers

were the last refuge of the inartistic and I must have a pattern, so of course I had to have a pattern, and now I keep thinking I should have liked a plain wall better."

"I always think your drawing-room so pretty, and I admire the paper—pink grapes and purple leaves are so unusuallooking," Mrs. Manners said kindly.

Mrs. Peacock glanced proudly round upon her French striped paper, her brocaded curtains, and draped piano.

"In furnishing a room one has to consider the style of the room itself and of the people who are to inhabit it," she said.

"Just so," remarked Miss Green, who had looked a little bored up to this time. "And what I think makes a room look really habitable and interesting is books—plenty of books, and bookcases of all sorts and sizes."

Of course there are no books or bookcases in Mrs. Peacock's drawing-room, unless an illustrated edition of Tennyson's Maud and a volume or so of Picturesque Europe may be called books.

"In a library, or even in a dining-room, books look very well and are quite in place, but hardly, I think, in a drawing-room," said Mrs. Peacock.

"Talking of books," said Miss Green, turning to Mrs. Welwyn, "how is your husband getting on with his book? Has he decided on the title yet?" (We all take a deep interest in Mr. Welwyn's book, and expect it to reflect great credit on Edenrise when it is published.)

"I think that the title is to be The Condition of France Immediately Before the Revolution; at any rate that is the subject," said Mrs. Welwyn, "and he is, he says, making great progress now, but he will be obliged to go to Paris again this week to collect material and to make some notes in the Bibliothèque Nationale."

"I should have thought he could have got everything he wanted in the British Museum," said Mrs. Peacock, who likes to appear to know something of any subject under discussion, or to change the subject rapidly if she does not. "There is, I believe, everything in the British Museum Library—"

"But not French manuscripts—I think it is manuscripts and letters and things like

that that he goes to study. Yes, I am sure it is manuscripts and letters that he has special permission to copy," said Mrs. Welwyn with some pride; for though she and her husband have very little in common, and I imagine are not in sympathy on most points, yet she feels it a distinction to be the wife of a man who is compiling a serious work and is obliged to go to Paris and study in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Mrs. Peacock looked properly impressed.

"How interesting!" she said, and then went on with a smile, "My husband is always regretting the days before we were married, when he had time to devote to original research, but now, of course, with a family and a practice to attend to, and one thing and another—"

"He is the most valuable member of society in Edenrise," said Mrs. Manners.

Mrs. Peacock acknowledged the compliment with a slight inclination of the head, and continued: "But do you know that my husband actually did once write a book, in collaboration with another doctor, on the

Allen !

Thyroid Gland, and since we were married, too!"

"How interesting!" said Mrs. Welwyn in her turn. "What is the thyroid gland?"

"Well, it is a kind of gland in the neck, and if it is too big you have goître and if it is too small you are an idiot," said Mrs. Peacock, displaying her superior knowledge lightly but with evident pleasure.

"How dreadful!" said Mrs. Welwyn nervously, putting up her hand and feeling her throat first on one side and then on the other.

"Has mumps anything to do with it?" asked Mrs. Manners, whose children had lately been suffering from that complaint.

"Well, no, I don't think so. No, that must be another gland. The thyroid gland goes very deep—I fancy it must be near the brain somehow, but if you haven't got it and are an idiot, you can be treated with a preparation of the thyroid glands of animals, and you soon get quite sensible. Dr. Peacock had a boy to treat. He was a dreadful child, and I must say I thought he

was worse when he was cured than he was before."

I laughed, and Mrs. Peacock hastened to add:

"Of course he was much less of an idiot—it was astonishing to see how quickly he gained intelligence—but then, you know, he got so dreadfully mischievous that we could not keep him in the house."

"What happened to him?" asked Mrs. Welwyn anxiously. We had all become deeply interested, for women always are interested in medical matters, even in the dullest and most unpromising cases.

"I believe that his mother gave him an overdose of the stuff and he died," she said. "But, anyhow, it was a most interesting case, and Dr. Peacock's book was mostly about it."

"It would have been still more interesting if he had not died," murmured Miss Green.

"If you had seen the boy you would have thought it a happy release," said Mrs. Peacock.

"What did you say the name of the lady was that had taken 'The Glen'?" asked

Mrs. Manners, returning to the subject previously under discussion.

"I heard that her name was Greenlaw and that she is a widow. It is rather much of a house for one woman, I should have thought, but still—" Mrs. Peacock waved her hand to indicate that as far as she was concerned every one might follow their own fancies.

"When shall we call upon her? Let me see. Supposing she moves in on Saturday." Mrs. Manners made elaborate calculations which puckered her brow and made her look ten years older. "It is now Wednesday; say she does not move on Saturday, but on Monday—Saturday is a bad day for moving—then we ought to allow her a week to settle her furniture and hang her pictures; that would be Monday week. Most likely the carpets will be put down before she moves in."

"I don't think that's a good plan," put in Mrs. Peacock. "Think of the muddy boots and the straw and things! It ruins carpets!"

Mrs. Manners proceeded calmly:

"After that there will be the books to

arrange on the shelves, and the cushions to recover, the curtains to be altered to fit the windows, and the china and glass to be put away in the cupboards. In any case I really do not think we ought to call upon her till Thursday week."

"I think, considering all things, that I shall leave it till the Friday," I said.

And so it was arranged that the newcomer should be left in peace to settle her household gods until that day, and on that day we would call and the advantages of Edenrise society would burst upon her.

Dr. Peacock and Mr. Green, the curate, came in at this point, and to them we disclosed all we knew of the expected parishioner and patient.

Dr. Peacock is extremely genial and a favourite with all the women in Edenrise, and the curate is certainly not less popular, for he is distinctly fond of feminine society, has a good voice, and a particularly intimate manner of shaking hands—so intimate, indeed, that at times it almost makes one blush.

We have a scheme on hand for making him into a vicar and giving him com-

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plete control of the chapel-of-ease in the village, which is now subject to the rector of the parish who officiates at the church three or four miles away. I am a little doubtful about the matter myself, for, though I know that a taste of cricket and croquet, a sonorous voice, and a predilection for female society are indispensable qualities in a curate, I am not so sure about the requirements of a vicar. And I cannot quite see how a bazaar is to be instrumental in turning a chapel-of-ease into a parish church and a curate into a vicar, though Miss Green has explained the matter at some length. I must ask Howard. Howard, by-the-bye, is my husband's Christian name, and we have tacked it on to our surname Jones, to distinguish us from other Joneses, and to remind people of the aristocratic connections we really have got. I must, I say, ask Howard.

CHAPTER II

OUR CHILDREN

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."—Proverbs.

WE housewives of Edenrise naturally find our most congenial occupation in dressing and bringing up our children, and in managing our houses genteelly on the small incomes which our menfolk are occupied in acquiring in the city.

Edenrise, though quite in the country, has many advantages apart from its natural attractions—there is a good train-service from London, the journey only occupying some forty-five minutes, the houses are charmingly grouped about the village green, and we flatter ourselves that our social life is unique. Miss Green, the curate's sister, has instituted literary afternoons, and we have singing practices and sewing-meetings, besides the ordinary so-

cial gatherings in which Mrs. Peacock, the doctor's wife, takes the lead. We have great faith in Mrs. Peacock's taste in matters of dress as well as in her social talents, and at the beginning of the season we never think of getting new clothes for our children until we have seen how hers will be dressed. When her little girls appear in very short sailor frocks and enormous sunbonnets, our little girls follow suit, their costumes varying in effect according to the skill of their mothers or nurses in the making of them. I have not myself, however, had quite such implicit faith in Mrs. Peacock since last summer, when our girl-children were dressed, French fashion, in long skirts and tight lace caps, for Phyllis Peacock got a sunstroke and my little Amabelle scandalized the neighbourhood by tying her skirts up round her armpits and playing leapfrog with the boys on the green. Her father, I am sorry to say, said that he considered it a perfectly rational proceeding, and that he must insist on having his children dressed sensibly. This I thought particularly hard, for Amabelle looked charming in her long petticoats when

she kept them in their proper place, and, as I took the opportunity of saying to Howard, I had not thought it necessary to dress her in a suitable costume for leapfrog! But he was quite firm on this occasion, and I had to make her an entire new set of clothes, much as I grudged the time and expense entailed.

He said, moreover, that Dick looked a disgusting little prig in a khaki suit with a wide-brimmed hat caught up on one side with a pheasant's feather; but I was determined he should wear the things, even though I was not altogether pleased with the effect myself, because Harold Peacock wore them, and one likes one's children to look like other people's children. Of course Howard persists in saying he prefers them to look like his own children; but that is the way with men—they decline to take any interest in discussing beforehand how their children shall be dressed, and then they condemn the finished article.

If it is difficult to dress children suitably, it is, I find, far more difficult to train them in a satisfactory manner; one's own children seem such original little things

that one fears to stamp out any ideas they may have by too much severity, and I know that I am sometimes wanting in firmness with mine. Only this afternoon, for instance, I happened to be dressing to go out, and Amabelle, who is six, sat on the bed, her brown eyes wide open, watching me while I sought for such things as gloves, pins, and ties. She was quite quiet and a little sad because I had refused to take her out with me, until suddenly, as I moved from the glass, she caught sight of herself and exclaimed angrily:

"Mother, what for did you born me with eyes like these? I wanted blue eyes!"

"Poor little girl," I said soothingly, "it wasn't really my fault, except that I quite forgot to order your eyes. I only stipulated for your father's good looks and my well-formed ears and sweet temper. I am so sorry you are not pleased. I rather like your eyes myself."

Amabelle was somewhat pacified by my humble tone, and, pursuing a course of ideas of her own, remarked:

"And when I was born I s'pose you looked at my teeth to see how old I was?"

"Yes, darling," I said, "and do you know you hadn't a single one, and I couldn't tell whether you were as old as the hills

or as young as a tiny rose-bud."

"And then did you give me a knife to cut some with?" she asked, and I was afraid she was going on to ply me with impossible questions, as she so often does. But it never fails to surprise one that children who are so penetrating and persistent at some moments, are so curiously flighty at others.

Amabelle's gaze was fastened now upon my hat, and she sighed and said pensively:

"I know it wouldn't be sootible for a little girl, but I should so like a black hat with feathers and a veil."

She seemed so depressed that I tried to cheer her up by putting the hat on her head and fastening the veil over her curls.

"Now I am a real mammy, and I want a purse with tickets in it to pay a call with," she said gaily as she strutted up and down the room. "Can't I go out with you? Be a kind little mother, please let me."

I began to shake my head, for I had told her more than once that I could not take her, but could I resist when she quoted in her most tragic manner, "Oh, mammy, 'it is twice ten tedious years since I a holiday, have seen!'"

Of course I took her with me, and of course she disgraced me by her behaviour. She sat on a chair quietly enough at Mrs. Welwyn's for some time, but, finding herself taken no notice of, began to fidget, and finally, when there was a lull in the conversation, she asked herself in a clear voice:

"Are they beauty ladies?" Then she paused a moment for effect before she answered herself in emphatic tones, "No, they are not beauty ladies!"

There was a general laugh at this, though I knew Mrs. Welwyn and Mrs. Peacock would remember it against me and my system of bringing up my children. Then Amabelle asked, with a shy smile, if she might go and see the kitchen.

It is always her first request on entering a strange house, and I had particularly impressed it upon her this afternoon that she was on no account to make it.

"Dear child," said Mrs. Welwyn graciously, "she shall see the kitchen and all

the other rooms if she likes. I am so sorry Nancy and Roger are not here to amuse her."

She rang the bell for the maid, and to my relief Amabelle was taken away.

When she had left us Mrs. Peacock began talking again about the great topic of interest among us just now—the lady who has taken "The Glen." I had had an opportunity of looking in since I listened to Mrs. Peacock's account of the internal decorations of the house, and I now made an attempt to sketch the character of the lady who is to inhabit it from the taste displayed in paint, paper, etc.

"It would hardly be safe to infer anything about me from the pattern of my wall-paper," said Mrs. Welwyn with a wistful smile at the luscious pink grapes and

purple leaves on her wall.

Her remark set me counting the number of grapes in the bunches opposite to me, and every time I counted them, even in the same bunch, I made the number different. Meanwhile, Mrs. Peacock and Mrs. Welwyn continued their conversation.

"In any case, she must be very artistic

and, I fancy, original. A person quite after our own hearts, I am sure," Mrs. Peacock said.

"Do you know if she lives quite alone?" asked Mrs. Welwyn, who is not so energetic or so clever at collecting little bits

of gossip as Mrs. Peacock.

"Yes, quite alone, and I hear that she looks very young to be a widow, poor thing! Her husband must have been dead some time, too," continued Mrs. Peacock thoughtfully, "or she would not be taking a house like 'The Glen,' and having it done up regardless of expense in this way."

"Why not?" I asked innocently, trying to take my fascinated eyes from the grapes on the wall to fix them upon my compan-

ions.

"Why not? It wouldn't be decent," Mrs. Peacock returned severely. "He must have been dead two years at least."

"I don't think we want a newcomer," Mrs. Welwyn said, sighing. "We are very well off as we are."

"Nonsense; a little fresh blood is just what we do want, and *I* am prepared to find Mrs. Greenlaw charming," said Mrs. Pea-

cock. "It is so lucky for us, too, that she is a widow. Our husbands need not call upon her, and we shall not have to invite her to dinner if we do not like."

"That is an advantage, certainly," said Mrs. Welwyn, laughing. "I can never get my husband to call on a stranger."

"Nor I mine," I said.

"I really haven't any trouble with Dr. Peacock in that respect," Mrs. Peacock said, looking a trifle superior. "Is your husband at home now?" she asked Mrs. Welwyn, changing the subject rather suddenly.

Mrs. Welwyn, I thought, looked conscious and even slightly annoyed as she answered in the negative, but I did not know whether to put her irritation down to Mrs. Peacock's question or to her husband's absence from home.

Mrs. Peacock said something in a conciliating tone about it being necessary nowadays to allow husbands freedom to follow their own pursuits, and she was so glad Mr. Welwyn was getting on so fast with his book.

Mrs. Welwyn flushed up and turned her

back on Mrs. Peacock to greet Amabelle, who came back at that moment.

I took my leave with the child, who was in a very happy mood and delighted with her investigations, which were, I am afraid, of too penetrating a nature. She was a good deal upset in the night, and I was obliged to go and console her more than once, and, after all, her pain only completely disappeared when she was comfortably settled in my bed and my chances of a decent night were at an end.

I find it extremely difficult to be firm with Amabelle. With Dick it comes easier, and I feel sure that it would come quite natural to me to treat the Peacock children with firmness—perhaps even with severity—for they are allowed to make perfect little nuisances of themselves. It is all done on a system, too. Their father has modern views on the training of children, and he is strongly of opinion that no reasonable childish impulse should be thwarted, and their mother has adopted the idea because it affords her a plausible excuse for thoroughly spoiling them. Accordingly, if they

wish to handle your lace collar with jammy fingers, or dance on your grand piano, or slide on your polished floor with muddy boots, it is a perfectly reasonable childish impulse, and must on no account be interfered with.

"My dear Harold," I heard Dr. Peacock say to his little boy, "if you wish to slide on the banisters you must do so on your own responsibility. I warn you that you may fall and hurt yourself." Harold desisted for that day, but the next he slid down on his own responsibility, lost his balance, and fell headlong. Fortunately for him, his fall was broken by the best bonnet of a lady caller who happened to be passing through the hall at the moment, and though Dr. Peacock attended her for some considerable time for nervous shock. neither she nor the child was seriously injured. The bonnet, I believe, never recovered.

A little firmness would, I am sure, do Harold a great deal of good and prevent many such disasters, and yet to a certain extent I sympathize with Dr. Peacock's ideas, and do not believe in the system of

thwarting children that Mrs. Welwyn adopts with hers.

"My dear, don't do that." "You mustn't do this." "For Heaven's sake don't go there!" she is forever saying, and it is simply because she is nervous herself and has not enough imagination to enter into their foolhardy little natures. And, after all, the children know they will get what they want when they have wearied her by whining and worrying for it. I should often like to say to her, "Why not let them do what they want to do without all the trouble of being cross and thwarting them?" But I am beginning to be cautious about expressing my opinion on such matters and to realize that it is easier to find flaws in other people's systems than to perfect one's own. I am quite ready to admit that I am sometimes weak with Amabelle, that I ought not to have taken her out this afternoon, for instance, just because she made an apt quotation from John Gilpin. I should not like her to grow up like Miss Green, whose only really original remarks are quotations. I have decided to be much firmer with her in future.

CHAPTER III

A LADIES' SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY

"Solitary reading is apt to give the headache. Besides, who knows that you do read?"—Lamb's Letters.

There is one thing for which I shall always be grateful to Miss Green, and that is that she introduced Shakespeare into Edenrise. I do not mean to say that we had never heard of Shakespeare; we were, indeed, quite familiar with his name, and some of us, who have had the advantage of a high-school education, can still remember the notes to one or two of the plays, and even portions of the Primer, which divides his work into sections or layers, with a fantastic name to each. But as for reading Shakespeare's plays since that time, what housewife would ever have thought of such a thing if it had not been for Miss Green?

She invited us all to tea one afternoon, and while we were drinking the very strong tea and eating the heavy cake that she and her brother are so fond of, she began to talk of her plan for starting a Shakespeare society at Edenrise. I immediately took up the idea, and astonished some of the other housewives by my knowledge of the Primer. And I added, hoping to further impress them, something about Shakespeare's legal wife and a "second-best bedstead."

Miss Green paid little attention to this, but, turning suddenly, asked me in her matter-of-fact way if I ever read Othello and Coriolanus, and I answered a little crestfallen, "Hardly ever," and resolved to be more careful about displaying my knowledge-or ignorance-before her in future. However, we decided then and there to start a society for the serious reading of Shakespeare's plays. Mr. Green, who was handing round the tea and cake, asked anxiously if he might be admitted as a member. Miss Green hesitated, and wavered for a moment. All the other ladies expressed themselves as so charmed at the idea of his joining us that I began to fear she would give way. I therefore remained obstinately silent, realizing that, as he would be the only man, we should be obliged to let him read Hamlet and Othello and all the best men's parts, and I said to myself scornfully, "Ten to one he will intone them."

When Miss Green finally decided that it was to be purely a ladies' society, and that not even a curate could be admitted, I was delighted, but Mrs. Peacock and Mrs. Welwyn were really disappointed, and their interest began to flag from that moment.

readings Nevertheless, the started, and they were, on the whole, as successful as one could expect under the circumstances, though I think now that they might have gone off better if Mr. Green had been present. We met, of course, in the afternoon and had tea, and sometimes the tea and talk lasted so long that the readings were cut short. It often happened, moreover, that when we were well under way, conversation of a purely personal nature was apt to bubble up in the midst of the most thrilling passages, for I have noticed that, however anxious people may seem to improve themselves and to welcome a literary meeting as a means of culture, they are never particularly anxious

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to stick to the subject in hand, but eagerly seize every opportunity of introducing a personal element.

I remember the time when we read Romeo and Juliet. It was most embarrassing. We had had a little difficulty at the previous meeting, for when it had been arranged that Miss Green should read Romeo and I Juliet, the other ladies insisted that it would not be necessary for them to at-After a good deal of persuasion, however, they all came, though it would be stretching a point to say they attended. Mrs. Welwyn, who read the part of the nurse, was furtively cutting her copy of the play with a hair-pin, and from the curious slips she made, it was evident that it was the first time she had looked at the part. Miss Green had, of course, studied hers and read it very well until she came to-

"Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—"

when somehow I failed to respond as promptly as I should have done—

[&]quot;O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon That monthly changes in her circled orb,"

and we all heard Mrs. Manners and Mrs. Welwyn, who sat together at one end of the table, lamenting, the one the size of her family, the other the difference of sex in hers, which precluded the proper passing on of garments from one to the other, and left her, as she said, with good boots on her hands!

I could not help smiling, having a fellow-feeling for Mrs. Welwyn, and, like her, two children of opposite sexes. But Miss Green, I am sorry to say, completely lost her temper and spoke very sharply to them both, while for the rest of the play she read as though she had taken a particular dislike to Juliet, so that I exclaimed—

"O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?"

more than once in the wrong place.

Another time, when we read Hamlet, there was a long discussion over the passage—

"Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables,"

some of us being of opinion that the passage should be taken in its literal sense, and Hamlet's mother credited with the virtue of careful housewifery, others holding that Hamlet's madness first shows itself in these words, and refusing to admit that the queen had even that much virtue.

"It is perfectly shocking what waste goes on in ordinary households! Do you know my cook saw almost a whole leg of mutton in Mrs. Smith's dust-bin? A whole leg! Only just a slice out of the middle! I would never permit such things to go on in my house, not if I were a millionaire!"

"What was your cook doing in Mrs. Smith's dust-bin?" said Mrs. Welwyn.

"Looking for a silver spoon," Mrs. Peacock answered mysteriously.

Miss Green frowned and moved impatiently.

"Perhaps, after all," said Mrs. Manners thoughtfully, leading the subject gently back to the play, "it may be better to be a little bit extravagant than to be as thrifty as Hamlet's mother and marry your deceased husband's brother as she did."

"When he was not even deceased," put in Mrs. Peacock; and when we laughed she added, "In any case, he did not act as though he were."

Naturally enough at this point the discussion turned on the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, and the vexed question as to whether or not it will make marriage with a deceased husband's brother legal.

There has never been any question about it, I believe, but women, as a rule, refuse to admit that one does not imply the other, and in any case public opinion in our neighbourhood is strongly in favour of things as they are.

"I think," said Miss Green severely at last, "that we had better get on with the reading, and have a special meeting to discuss all these interesting questions."

We sighed, and returned reluctantly to the play, but we never got beyond the third act. The reading, as a reading, was hardly a success, whereas the play as a subject of discussion might have proved really interesting.

We had, moreover, serious differences of opinion as to what should or should not be omitted in reading the plays aloud. Miss Green said that we were all ladies,

and there was no need to omit anything. Mrs. Peacock said that the very fact of our being ladies made it necessary to leave out some things. If we had been men or angels the case might have been different! And so we came to no proper understanding, and we did as we thought fit at the moment, omitting or substituting as the fancy took us. Mrs. Welwyn, for instance, could never bring herself to say "damn," whatever happened, and she put in "dashes" and "Oh my's" instead. In reading Lady Macbeth she rather weakly substituted "Out, little spot," for "Out, damned spot!" and of course we all laughed. On other occasions she simply omitted the "word of sin" and the metre suffered.

Mrs. Peacock is much bolder as regards words, but when she has plunged right into the midst of a doubtful passage she is apt to grow suddenly self-conscious, and begin to stammer, and then, as a rule, she stops dead and says "etcetera," so that the next person is at a loss to know where to go on, and as often as not the thread is lost and we have to pass on to the next scene.

Notwithstanding such trifling draw-

backs, I, for one, am really grateful to Miss Green for the spirit she has shown in starting and carrying through these readings. I should certainly never have thought of reading Shakespeare otherwise, and now I read little else. I have dropped my subscription to the circulating library, because I find the tragedies so much more bracing than the last new novel, in which the sentiments are carefully boiled down to suit chaste women, and insinuation takes the place of healthy expression of feeling. And I am recommending all my friends when worried by domestic cares—when the butcher sends tough meat, and the laundress tears the sheets, and the money is not forthcoming to pay the weekly bills—to sit down calmly and read one of the tragedies, and I promise them that when they come back to their petty cares they will find they have assumed quite other proportions, and are not the mountains of woe that they appeared before.

Miss Green talks now of starting Browning readings next winter, as we may be said to have "done" Shakespeare, and of getting the men to come, but I know that

Howard detests Browning, and Dr. Peacock would always have an important patient to attend if he found the meetings at all dull. Mr. Welwyn is a literary light in his own line, but I am afraid he would be altogether too serious for us; and Mr. Manners (though he is fond of poetry, and recites with a great deal of spirit) has seven children and a tendency to rheumatism, and I do not think much can be expected of him; while Mr. Green's tastes lie more in the direction of tennis, afternoon teas, and croquet than of the poets. His sister does her best to keep him up to the mark. She writes his sermons for him, and she tries to keep him from entanglements with his numerous lady friends, but I do not think she will ever succeed in making him a student of Browning. He will, of course, marry one of these days, in spite of all her efforts, and then, though I am by no means a matchmaker, I have set my heart on her marrying a bishop. I keep wishing that my circle of acquaintances included more dignitaries of the Church, so that I might have the pleasure of introducing them to her. Howard says there is not, and never

has been, such a thing as a single bishop, though he has an idea that they are frequently widowers, and he has promised to look out for one for me.

"However, if she marries an ordinary clergyman, she will no doubt make a bishop of him in a very short time," I remarked to Howard as we sat together after dinner a night or so ago. "You should have heard the masterly manner in which she defended the missionary spirit against my attacks when we were discussing The Tempest the other day."

"I am thankful I didn't," he returned.

"She really ought to be grateful to me," I went on, "because I am the only woman who ever opposes her in argument (I cannot even rely on Mrs. Peacock to stand up to her); and it is so bad for a person to be always laying down the law—in the pulpit and out of it—with no one to contradict."

Howard laughed.

"The Tempest might afford a good field for discussion."

"I assure you it did," I answered. "It almost broke up the society. Miss Green

defended Prospero and the missionary spirit. I stood up for Caliban, the lawful owner of the island, and contended that he was a really interesting and original character ruined by a mistaken zeal for civilization and education. I amazed her by referring to Ferdinand and Miranda as lovesick puppets, and classing Trinculo and Stephano with Prospero, who, like modern explorers, introduce sophisticated vices to innocent islanders. Miss Green waxed extraordinarily eloquent in reply. You should have heard her! In the end her discourse turned on the Temperance question and we had to listen to a long harangue."

"Couldn't you stop her?" asked How-

ard in a suspiciously sleepy voice.

"I know better than to try to stop any one who begins on the Temperance question," I said. "By-the-bye, Miss Green is hoping that our new neighbour will prove a supporter of hers in that line. But judging from the decoration of the drawing-room in there"—I waved my hand in the direction of "The Glen"—"I do not expect her to go in for Temperance or Woman's Rights, or anything of that sort."

- "How childish you are!" Howard said.
- "What do you think Mrs. Greenlaw will be like?" I asked, taking no notice of his last remark.
- "I hope she will be like Mrs. Welwyn," he said sleepily.
- "You may go to sleep if you like," I remarked impatiently, taking up a book. "A tortoise would be as interesting to talk to as you are! I wonder whether there is a word which would apply to husbands in the evenings, in the same way as hibernating applies to certain animals in winter. One might say, I think, that husbands vespernated, if one were writing their natural history."

Something uncommonly like a snore was Howard's only response.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CURATE'S BEES

"The Bee is but small amongst the foules, yet doth her fruit passe in sweetenesse."—*Ecclesiasticus*.

Some little time ago I had a great desire to keep bees, and I tried hard to persuade Howard that Edenrise was a particularly favourable place for their cultivation, and that our garden was peculiarly suitable for the purpose. But (as husbands will) he persistently discouraged me. He said that I had no time to attend to bees; that the children would be stung if we kept them; that bees are subject to all kinds of mysterious diseases; that they are devoured by all sorts of unexpected vermin. "And besides," he always added, to clinch the matter, "I hate moral insects!"

It goes without saying that these arguments did not seriously damp my ardour, and the curate (who continually boasts of

the sums that he makes by the sale of his honey) having undertaken to instruct me in the art of bee-keeping, I spent some little time in investigating the interior of his hives with him and in watching him manipulate the bees. It all seemed so simple and fascinating that I was quite determined to try my hand, and I had begun to save the money for the necessary outlay in hives, bees, and apparatus, when one hot day last summer I paid an unfortunate call upon Miss Green and had my faith in the docility of bees rudely shaken.

A hot east wind was blowing—the sort of wind that affects the temper of the most serene of human beings, and apparently it has an equally evil effect on the moral tone of the bee.

I felt hot and cross when I arrived at Miss Green's, and I sat down in her little study to wait, for the servant said she was in the garden and would be with me in a moment. I fanned myself with my hand-kerchief as I looked out of the French window upon the parched grass-plot and thirsting flowers, their heads drooping dismally in the blazing sun. Suddenly I saw

Miss Green dart out from behind some bushes at the end of the little garden, and approach the house in an extraordinarily undignified manner. She was attired in the green veil and the thick gloves of the bee-keeper, and I was soon aware that her unusual animation was caused by a swarm of bees which was relentlessly pursuing her along the garden path. Her pace increased as she neared the house, and when she reached the window she almost hurled herself through it into the room, banging the glass doors behind her with all the force of which she was capable. The bees, however, were too quick for her, and in a moment the room seemed filled with the noise of their angry buzzing. (A noise which I still hear in quiet moments when I begin to feel the desire to keep bees reviving within me!)

"They will calm down in a moment. It is the heat—only the heat—and the bellows, which wouldn't act!" said Miss Green in excited tones. "Do keep calm, quite calm! It is only the heat!"

She began to dance about as she spoke, for one or two of the bees had managed to

get inside her veil and I heard their angry note change to one of deep satisfaction as they fastened upon her, freely sacrificing their lives in their thirst for revenge.

There was no need to tell me to keep calm—I was quite calm—until I suddenly felt a sharp sting on my own hand, and then I turned and fled almost without a word, leaving Miss Green to wrestle alone, and to get rid of the bees as best she could.

For several days after this unfortunate visit I was obliged to wear my arm in a sling, and Miss Green did not get off so easily as that. She was almost unrecognisable, and did not venture out for the best part of a week.

Her brother, who came to inquire for me, and to explain the conduct of his moral insects, told me that I could not have had a better lesson in the manner of how not to manage bees. That it was madness to attempt to take the honey in such weather. That perfect calmness and coolness are of the first importance in their treatment, and that if you cannot impress a bee with your moral superiority, it is useless to attempt to manage a hive. His sister, he said, had signally failed in this respect, and he considered the conduct of his bees perfectly justifiable.

I glanced at my arm, which hardly looked like a human limb. I seemed to hear again the vindictive buzzing of the insects in Miss Green's little study, and my desire to interfere with such excitable creatures completely faded.

"I think that bees require a masculine firmness in their treatment, which neither Miss Green nor I possess," I said.

Mr. Green agreed with me, and his sister so far fell in with this view of the matter that she has left the practical management of the hives entirely to him since that day, and has contented herself with making an exhaustive study of the manners and customs of bees, beginning with the Fourth Georgic and ending with Maeterlinck's Vie des Abeilles.

She has been very much interested and absorbed in the study during the whole winter, and no doubt she pointed out to Mr. Green how naturally the subject lends itself to religious treatment, and most likely

it was she who wrote the sermon which he preached yesterday morning.

He took for his text, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise." And when he had very briefly considered the ways of the ant, he passed on to consider the ways of the bee much more in detail, enlarging on the internal economy of the hive, and drawing an obvious parallel between Providence and the bee-keeper.

I was very much interested myself, but I do not think the sermon was properly appreciated by the bulk of the congregation. It was considered an innovation. Some rude little boys were even heard to buzz when Mr. Green came out of church, and Howard's Aunt Jane expressed herself on the subject in a very decided manner as I walked home with her after the service.

"I don't approve of it," she said, jerking her head to emphasize her words. "An essay on the bee instead of a sermon with good sound doctrine, such as we have a right to expect. It won't do, my dear! It won't do! What do you think, John?" she asked suddenly, turning to her husband,

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who was walking half a pace behind us, carrying a large prayer-book in his hand.

"I thought it very interesting, my

dear," he said, with a deprecating smile.

"It may be interesting. I did not say that it was not interesting. What I ask is, Is it suitable from the pulpit? I doubt it, and I regret to see the modern prying spirit, turning outside what Providence has placed inside, showing itself even in the church!"

"If I were a bee," I said, laughing, "I am sure I should resent having my private affairs made public property in such a manner."

Aunt Jane's eyes twinkled.

"And besides," she said, "there is no real parallel between bees and men; they are guided by blind instinct, unconscious of right and wrong, whereas we act consciously on moral principles."

"Oh!" I began, but I stopped, knowing that I was unequal to arguing with Aunt Jane on such a subject, and I turned the conversation, clumsily, but successfully as it happened, by an inquiry concerning her new spring bonnet.

Easter will soon be here, and on Easter Sundays Aunt Jane always appears at church in a new bonnet, which causes her long and earnest thought for weeks before. The number of unseasonable birds, fruits, and flowers she manages to arrange on its surface is always a source of wonder and admiration to me and of the highest satisfaction to herself. But Aunt Jane acts on moral principles, and so when she wears her new bonnet for the first time she puts on a new pair of shoes, which pinch her toes and prevent her mind from dwelling too exclusively on her head-gear!

All through the service she sings loudly in what she calls a "natural alto"—a part entirely of her own invention—and only this morning I saw Mr. Green, who is decidedly musical, turn and look at her in a manner which would have covered an ordinary person with confusion, but Aunt Jane did not display a sign of self-consciousness.

Poor Aunt Jane! It is refreshing to see what pleasure she still derives from trifles. The energy she throws into them is wonderful considering that her life has been an unceasing struggle against poverty and

misfortune. I am afraid to say how many children she has borne and buried, but I know that she has only one consumptive son living now, whom she and Uncle John stint themselves in every possible way to keep in comfort somewhere in South Africa.

Howard has a particular affection for Aunt Jane, but Uncle John is quite unable to cope with her vigorous and determined mind, and when he is worried in any way he shuts himself up in his own room with the Vicar of Wakefield, and he seldom emerges until he has read it through, though I am sure he must have had it by heart years ago, poor man! His wife insists on the substitution of Bunyan's Holy. War on Sundays.

When I had thoroughly discussed the question of the new bonnet with Aunt Jane, and we had decided that ostrich plumes, bunches of grapes, and butterflies should form a part of its decoration, we were almost at the door of our house, and as we passed "The Glen," which is the house next ours nearer the church and the village, we saw a lady and gentleman come out at the

gate. The lady had red-gold hair and a very elegant figure which was set off to advantage by a well-cut costume of pale gray.

"Your new neighbour," said Aunt Jane in a loud aside. "But I thought she was a

widow. Who is the gentleman?"

"Some relation, I suppose," I said. And as we turned in at our own gardengate I took the opportunity of a good look at the backs of the two figures retreating in the direction of the railway station.

"She knows how to dress," said Aunt Jane admiringly. "I am so glad on your account the house is taken. I never could bear an empty house next door to me, with an untidy garden and everything going to rack and ruin."

"Dick and Amabelle will be sorry," I said rather sadly, "for there is nothing they enjoy so much as squeezing through the hedge to play in the empty garden."

"You must put barbed wire in the gaps to prevent it now," said Aunt Jane in her

most decided manner.

"Think of their clothes!" I said as I took leave of her.

I found Howard sitting by the fire reading, as I had left him.

"You ought to have been at church; we had a sermon all about bees," I said, putting my hands over his book.

"Then I am glad I wasn't there; I hate

moral insects," he said cheerfully.

"Miss Green must have written the sermon," I went on, "but she did not say the interesting things she said to me the other day—or perhaps her brother left them out as unsuitable."

"What interesting things?" asked Howard.

"Oh, only that she looks forward to the time when human affairs will be managed on the same system as the bee has adopted! When the work of the world will be done by sexless workers, untroubled by the cares of family life, and the business of continuing the race will be relegated to the background and carried out by specialized individuals."

"I don't believe Miss Green told you that," Howard said incredulously. "But it would be an excellent subject for discussion at your Shakespeare meetings." (It is one of Howard's favourite jokes that we do not read Shakespeare when we meet for that purpose, but discuss things in general.) "Have you discussed it yet?"

"Well, no, I am afraid it would lead us too far," I said in a superior tone. "When we meet to read, we *read*; and besides, Mrs. Peacock is like you, she has a violent prejudice against the bee."

"Sensible woman!" said Howard.

"Mrs. Manners is very well content with the present order of things," I went on. "She is not in the least open to the discussion of new schemes, and I don't quite know about Mrs. Welwyn."

"And what do you think?"

"I? Oh, I agree with Aunt Jane that what Providence has mercifully placed inside we have no right to turn outside, and the inner life of the bee is no concern of mine! Besides, bees sting horribly when they are interfered with," I added, laughing.

"I am glad you have come round to my point of view," said Howard approvingly. "If I were a naturalist I would rather study anything—jelly-fish even, than the

bee."

"I believe a jelly-fish to be much more capable of independent action, less vindictive, and not nearly so grasping," I said; but, on the whole, I am sure I should find the snail more interesting. There is a great deal to be said for the snail, but naturalists are so dreadfully prejudiced in favour of some animals and so very unfair to others! And now I come to think of it, naturalists are almost always men."

CHAPTER V

MRS. WELWYN'S MATRIMONIAL TROUBLES

"And no man that imparteth his Griefes to his Friend, but hee grieveth the lesse."—Bacon.

EVERY one likes Mrs. Manners, and her husband and seven children simply adore her. She is not exactly beautiful, and she has not Mrs. Peacock's social qualities, nor does she make learned quotations like Miss Green, but she looks at you with her clear eyes and you feel that she understands and that you can trust her. A perfectly truthful, unaffected woman is rare anywhere, and I am sure Mrs. Manners would be appreciated and confided in wherever she lived. At Edenrise we all go to her for advice and sympathy in domestic difficulties; her servants tell her about their love-affairs, and the curate pours out his heart to her, while Miss Green, I believe, advises her how to advise him. I have often wondered whether Mrs. Welwyn goes so far as to confide her matrimonial troubles to her, for troubles she certainly has, and she must have some difficulty in keeping them to herself.

She is pretty and a little bit affected, very timid, and, I think, inclined to be hysterical, because she cannot understand her husband's point of view, and because he does not give her the admiration which he gave spontaneously in their first year of marriage. In any case they seem to me to drift farther and farther apart. I am sorry for the poor little woman, and am ready to believe, with Howard, who is angry that her husband neglects her, that there is something in her which might have been brought out under more favourable circumstances. At the same time I can't help liking Mr. Welwyn. I admire his vigour of mind and body, and I like his name—Julius—it seems to me so appropriate. He is a professor at the University College, Bond Street, keenly interested in his work and in the book which he is writing, and often away collecting material for it. When we all meet I talk to him, or listen with interest, while Howard talks to Mrs. Welwyn, and I wonder all the time what he can find to talk to her about, for if she comes to tea with me alone, I rack my brains in vain for a suitable topic of conversation.

I have a way of running through the alphabet in search of a subject: A-antiquity, animosity, arrogance—nothing beginning with A seems suitable. Try B-B appears to be more promising, and I start with Babies, but mothers invariably differ on the treatment of infants, and so I hurry on to Beetles, and then there is the Butcher -fortunately the butcher is always with us, and his villainies are a fruitful source of discussion in Edenrise. After that I try C, D, E, with indifferent results, and all the while I am aware that I have a preoccupied air, and my efforts to shake it off are quite unavailing. But really, it is very difficult for an ordinary person to be polite and entertaining when she is not interested is, in fact, bored to death—and women are so reserved that they rarely or never speak of what they feel seriously about. They smile and talk of the weather and the last novel they have read, when the facts and difficulties of their own lives are weighing upon them, and you know it, and they know that you know it and would be glad to help them with your sympathy, but still they smile and talk about the weather.

Strangely enough, Mrs. Welwyn, when she came in this afternoon, threw down these barriers of reserve, and for the first time since I have known her began to talk spontaneously to me of a matter that really affected her seriously.

"I do not know if I ought to talk to you—or to any one," she began, nervously twisting the gloves she held in her hands, "but I feel I must talk to somebody."

"You are unhappy. I wish I could help you. What is it?" I asked.

Tears came into her eyes. "You are so sympathetic!" she said.

And then there was an awkward pause, during which she was evidently trying to make up her mind what to say and how to say it. At last she burst out:

"Do you know that—that I don't think I can go on living with Julius any more. It

is all so—so dreadfully difficult, and I am so unhappy!"

"Why?" I asked, taking her hand in mine. "Don't you love him?"

"I don't know," she answered, turning her head away. "I admire him, but I could not—I cannot give him the sort of love he wants—and—and— Oh, I wonder if you can understand," she broke off, "or if I am the only woman who ever felt like this!"

"I don't understand yet," I said as gently as I could.

"I will tell you—everything," she said. She began with the utmost difficulty, speaking in short, jerky sentences, and from time to time I helped her on with a word or a question until at last she had told me all her trouble.

"When I was married," she said, "I didn't know anything. I thought I loved Julius—I admired him so much, I thought him so splendid. I liked him to love me—I was a silly, spoiled child; and then—then, you know, marriage and everything was so different from what I expected. It was a shock to me. I couldn't understand Julius's feelings and I couldn't respond to them.

I tried to, but it was no good. He wanted something that I couldn't give. And if I was natural and affectionate to him in my own way he was always wanting something more. It worried me. It was always going on, and I showed him too plainly what I felt, I suppose, and he was hurt with me—and I was hurt with him—I thought he ought to understand me when he knew so much."

She looked at me with her eyes brimming over with tears to see if I was able to follow her.

"Couldn't you explain yourself? Couldn't you talk things out with him?" was all I could say.

"How could I? It was quite impossible. He could never understand; I soon saw that. I am not blaming him; I do not see how a man could possibly understand a woman like me."

"Oh, my dear, it can't be so bad as that!" I said.

"I think it is," she said hopelessly.

"You can't explain some things to some people; you can only feel them——"

"Try to explain," I said.

She shook her head.

"I can explain them to you because you do feel them."

I shook my head in my turn.

"Oh, yes, you do!" she said quickly, and then she went on again, jerking out her words with the same effort as before.

"Then, you know, the babies came. I was frightened, and Julius was very patient with me. But I know that he thought things would be different after they were born. They were not a bit different, except, of course, I had the children. It was not a bit better. I think I wanted to be let alone more than ever. And—and one day I told him so, and we quarrelled hopelessly. I suppose I told him so at the wrong moment and in the wrong way. He was dreadfully angry."

Her head dropped on my shoulder and she sobbed.

I smoothed the hand that I held in mine and tried to encourage her to unburden herself. It was pathetic to me to see her struggling with her emotion and striving to find words to express her feelings about one of the most difficult matters that women have to deal with.

"He was so angry that I was fright-ened," she went on. "I did not know he would feel like that. How could I know? I cannot forget the look on his face" (she shuddered). "He went away, right out of the house. He said—he said—he would never try to force my feelings. If I did not love him he did not want me, he could do without me. And so he does—ever since."

"Has this been going on long?" I asked.

"Yes, a long time. He lets me alone, and of course I know that he goes to see another woman in London. I daresay you know it, and perhaps every one in Edenrise knows it." She lifted her head and spoke with some heat. "Mrs. Peacock knows it, and her sympathy makes me sick. I hate it! I don't want to be treated as a neglected wife. And Julius treats me like a strange child!" she ended a little fretfully.

"Have you honestly tried to look at things from his point of view? Surely you can do something," I said.

- "I think I have tried—I don't know. Perhaps I am just beginning. Why are things so difficult, and why are girls so ignorant?"
- "Why are they?" I echoed. "It isn't fair that they should know absolutely nothing about these things until they are married——"

"And it is too late," Mrs. Welwyn put in.

- "I hope we shall be able to do better for our children," I said, my motherly feelings getting the upper hand for the moment.
- "I can't bear to think of that," she said, with a little sort of shiver. "It is so difficult to bring up children. I shall never know what to tell them, or what not to tell them, and I have never dared to talk to any one myself about these things—never! My mother wouldn't talk to me, or I couldn't talk to her. I look round on other married people and wonder—wonder all the time how they really feel towards one another—if they are happy together, or if they are only keeping up appearances before the world."

"I often wonder too," I said.

"But you are happy?" she asked a little anxiously.

"Yes, but Howard is so sympathetic," I

said. "We understand one another.

"It's you who are sympathetic, and I want you to tell me what to do," Mrs. Welwyn continued. "I really want your advice. I can't decide on anything, but I keep thinking that Julius ought to be free, to live with some one else altogether if he wants to. But what can I do? There are the children. And then I know that Julius will only laugh at me if I suggest such a thing to him."

"Don't be hasty about that," I said quickly. "Think it over. Things will come

right yet with a little patience."

"I can't think it," she said wearily.

"Julius hasn't any patience with me. I know I have been dreadfully foolish, but I couldn't help it. And I cannot do anything now, unless I can set him free, because my feelings are just the same—I think they are —only I begin to feel—I don't know what I feel—but I know that I don't like people to talk about Julius as they do and treat me

as though he neglected me. It is degrading."

My heart went out to her. Her conventional bringing up and the knowledge she had acquired, since her marriage, of the superiority of her own sex in the virtue of chastity, has served only to humble her, and such ideas as she has on the subject she has arrived at quite unaided.

"Our so-called virtue is in our blood and is no more a merit than our complexions," I said, though I do not think she followed my line of argument.

She sighed, and I began to beg her to go to her husband, to force her feelings a little if necessary. At any rate, to insist on having it out with him.

"You must begin," I said. "You can-

not go on like this."

"I cannot, oh, I cannot!" she said in evident distress. "You don't know how impossible it is!"

"If I had quarrelled with Howard in

such a way—" I began.

"Could you? Would it be possible?" she asked eagerly.

"I can conceive of such a thing. And if

I had," I went on, perhaps not quite truthfully, "I should go to him and make him make it up. I would excuse him in every way and freely own myself in the wrong."

I stopped, for Mrs. Welwyn is so sensitive that she began to shrink away from me—she could not consider such a course. She was much too timid to make advances, and I had to assure her again and again that my attitude towards her was not an unsympathetic one, and that she had not done wrong in confiding her troubles to me.

"It has done me so much good to talk to you," she said.

And before I had time to reply Mrs. Manners came in.

Mrs. Welwyn pressed her tearful face to mine and left without another word.

"Mrs. Welwyn was just asking me the recipe for a pudding," I said casually when I had closed the door upon her.

Mrs. Manners looked straight into my eyes and said:

"Poor little woman! I know she has her troubles, and I believe she confides in you. I hope you advise her well."

"I think I do," I said rather hesitating-

ly; and then I added with conviction, "Yes, I assure you, my dear, that that pudding could not hurt a fly."

I was so glad it was Mrs. Manners and no one else who came just then, for any other lady would have questioned me exhaustively, and I find it so hard to tell a lie that I should have bungled and roused further suspicions. It surprised me at first that Mrs. Welwyn should have chosen me and not Mrs. Manners to confide in, but after all, it is only natural for her to feel that a woman with an adoring husband and seven children must be biassed in matrimonial matters. I do not myself think that Mrs. Manners would be capable of understanding her point of view, because her manner of regarding things is so much more simple and natural.

When Howard came home in the evening I was absent-minded, and omitted to answer several questions that he put to me. I failed to take any interest in the news of the day. Literary topics fell flat, and when he tried one or two of his stock irritants—subjects that he keeps in reserve on pur-

pose to rouse my anger—I was as meek as a lamb.

"What is it, Catherine?" he asked with some concern after I had put two lumps of sugar into his coffee, sugar being a thing he detests. "What has Dick been doing? Or is it the cook? Or has Mrs. Peacock been telling you anything about me?"

"How can you be so foolish?" I replied without a smile. "Such trifles have no interest at all for me. I have been thinking about Women, in the abstract and with a capital W. I cannot think of anything else just now."

Howard whistled very softly.

"What has set you thinking?" he said.

"Well, Mrs. Welwyn came to see me this afternoon, and it was she who put ideas into my head. Things trouble me."

Howard looked incredulous.

"Mrs. Welwyn put ideas into your head?" he repeated. "She couldn't do it! I suppose some one has been telling her about Welwyn?"

"She knows it," I said shortly.

"Well, I don't pretend to understand the business," he said, putting the matter in his legal way. "Here is a man with a charming little wife, and he neglects her for a perfectly ordinary person. I have seen him with her in town. One never knows."—He shrugged his shoulders. "Men are the queerest creatures!"

"Not so queer as women," I put in.

"I know, of course," he went on, "that Welwyn and his wife are not on a level intellectually, but what does that matter? I don't neglect you because you take no interest in politics, or in anything else that is interesting to an intellectual person like me."

I hardly smiled. His manner showed some little curiosity as he asked:

"Did Mrs. Welwyn complain to you of her husband, then?"

"No, she did not blame him," I an-

swered briefly.

"In my opinion," Howard said in a thoughtful tone, "she is altogether too sensitive and refined for Welwyn, and that is the reason why they don't get on."

"Now you have got to the root of the matter," I said, smiling in what I felt to be a very aggravating manner. "But my

opinion is that it is quite time that women realized that refinement is not the only requisite in a wife; that it is, in fact——"

Howard pinched me.

"I know what you are going to say," he remarked.

"I was only going to say that what one has most need of in married life is imagination."

"I have found patience and good temper indispensable!" he said, smiling.

"You!" I ejaculated, throwing all the sarcasm of which I am capable into the word. "But, after all, imagination is the essential thing—though to be a really efficient wife one would want more virtues than there are! As for husbands—"

"They monopolize the virtues," Howard put in.

I treated the remark with the scorn it deserved, and he soon returned to the subject of the Welwyns, which I had been hoping he would allow to drop. I did not intend to tell him what Mrs. Welwyn had told me, for I hardly knew how he would regard the matter, and I cherished the idea of keeping it to myself until things had come right

between them, when I would tell him all about it, adding triumphantly:

"I knew this all along."

It was a pleasing idea, but somehow Howard is too clever for me. I seldom succeed in concealing anything from him for long, and he knew as much as I did about the matrimonial troubles of the Welwyns before I realized that I was telling him.

"Well," he said, "I wouldn't have believed it! Now I understand Welwyn."

"Don't be hard on her. It is not all her fault," I pleaded. "Men don't realize how girls are brought up; how they have been trained in ignorance for generations, taught to idealize love and to ignore their primitive instincts. The wonder is that any of us have any natural feelings left by the time we marry."

"There is curiosity; fortunately that will die hard," Howard said, smiling at my warmth.

I went on in the same tone:

"It is men who have been to blame. They have invented our heroines for us, and have set us our standard of feminine virtue; and we, in our desire to please, have lived up to it only too well. I believe we are still suffering from the unwholesome effect such heroines as Clarissa Harlowe had upon the minds of our grandmothers."

"And Mrs. Welwyn's attitude is simply the result of accumulated ignorance, aggravated by false ideals," Howard said, laughing.

"That's it," I said.

"Well, all I can say is," he went on more seriously, "that a man with real tact and patience would soon have got over that! But, then, why did she marry him?"

"Accumulated ignorance," I said, and after a moment's thought I went on. "Mr. Welwyn may not have any tact or patience, but he did the only sensible thing to be done under the circumstances. He let her alone. And I feel sure that she is beginning now to see things in a different light."

"What advice did you give her? I hope you told her some wholesome truths," Howard said.

"Oh, I wish she had confided in Mrs. Manners, or in any one but me," I said wearily. "I never think of the right thing to say till afterward. I haven't got a legal

mind, and I am so readily influenced by another person's point of view that I lose my own. I wish she had confided in Mrs. Manners. She would have been of much more use to her. Life is such a simple matter to Mrs. Manners."

"Oh, don't let us talk about Mrs. Manners!" Howard said impatiently. "I would just as soon talk about a law of nature! She is just as invariable and not a bit more interesting. Her serenity aggravates me."

"And she is the one woman of my acquaintance whom I sincerely admire," I said, seizing the opportunity of disagreeing with him; "and the reason I admire her is that she still seems to be in touch with nature, while the rest of us are mere bundles of convention, without any natural feelings."

"Not even curiosity?" Howard said satirically.

"We may be curious about what other people think of us," I said, "but when it comes to really serious subjects most of us only concern ourselves with what it is expected of us to feel." "Your serious subjects are your husbands and children," Howard said with such an air of being pointed and clever that I felt obliged to snub him.

"You are shockingly flippant," I remarked, with a show of irritation. "You never can be serious, and I am always thanking Heaven that Dick is like me and not like you."

"You don't know how often I thank Heaven for the same reason," he said so meekly that I was obliged to relent, and we spent the rest of the evening in the most amicable manner.

CHAPTER VI

THE APPEARANCE OF THE SIREN IN EDENRISE

"The characters of great and small
Come ready made, we can't bespeak one;
Their sides are many, too, and all
(Except ourselves) have got a weak one."

Locker.

OF course we do not gossip at Edenrise, though we may take an intelligent interest in our neighbours' affairs. For instance, we are amused when Mrs. Peacock's governess (who is Swiss and who advertised herself in a Geneva newspaper—"d'un certain âge et de toute moralité") sets her cap at the village chemist, and we periodically deplore the rumoured advent of Mrs. Manners' eighth child. We naturally like to hear little tales of the prematrimonial days of our respectable, God-fearing neighbours, and we are in a flutter of excitement when the curate is contemplating a pro-

posal of marriage. But we never indulge in ill-natured gossip. Indeed, before Mrs. Greenlaw came to Edenrise there was little or nothing to gossip about.

The day on which we had arranged that it would be suitable to call on the newcomer seemed long in coming, and when it at length arrived, and Mrs. Peacock had already equipped herself in a new bonnet and a chiffon ruffle of extraordinary proportions, the envy of the neighbourhood, the news reached her through "Toute Moralité" (who had had it from the chemist) that Mrs. Greenlaw was not a widow at all, but was separated from her husband. "A judicious separating," "Toute Moralité" reported it to be.

This was a terrible blow for Mrs. Peacock, and she was for the moment quite at a loss to know how to act. Up to this time the domestic relations of the housewives of Edenrise had been beyond a doubt—no wives living apart from their husbands, no widowers or bachelors (always excepting the curate, whom his landlady had described as "most as good as a female") had disturbed our equanimity. The lives

of our neighbours were, or we supposed them to be, an open book to us.

Mrs. Peacock sank into a chair completely overcome by "Toute Moralité's" news, and then, feeling that some decisive action was necessary, she took off her chiffon ruffle and came to call upon me.

"O Mrs. Howard - Jones!" she burst out as soon as she entered my drawing-room, "what do you think? Mrs. Greenlaw is not a widow at all, but is separated from her husband! And what are we to do? Are we to call upon her, or are we to ignore her existence? The black-and-white and pale-gray dresses she wears quite deceived me. I was certain she was a widow!"

"They suit her golden hair and green eyes remarkably well," I said. "And now I come to think of it, I fancy she shows very good taste in dressing in neutral tints. If she wore black we might conclude that her husband had left her and she was sorry for it—"

"And if she wore bright colours we might think she was glad to be rid of him," broke in Mrs. Peacock, taking up the idea in her quick way. "But perhaps, after all, the chemist was wrong, and she is not really separated from her husband."

"I am afraid he is right," I said.

"Howard happens to have heard of it from another source."

"You knew that all this time, and you never told me!" exclaimed Mrs. Peacock. "I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"I haven't had time to tell you," I said meekly. "I heard it only last night. Howard said nothing until he had made sure it was the same Mrs. Greenlaw, and the same husband and everything. You know what a calculating, legal mind he has!"

"Well, then, I certainly shall not call upon her," said Mrs. Peacock, settling herself firmly in her chair.

"I shall be obliged to," I began cautiously. "Our gardens are only separated by a privet hedge with bare patches in it, and it will be impossible to ignore the existence of such a near neighbour. Besides, I have already lent her my high steps."

"How rash of you! But has any one actually called upon her?" said Mrs. Peacock.

"Yes, the rector and his wife. They are 74

some distant relation of Mrs. Greenlaw's I believe, and she wore her best zebra costume. I wonder why stout, middle-aged ladies are so fond of broad black and white stripes, and always wear them on state occasions. They don't make them look thin; it can't be for that."

This created a diversion, for Mrs. Peacock is a trifle inclined to embonpoint herself, deeply interested in the question of stripes and spots, and always ready to discuss the matter with a friend. But, interesting as the topic was, it could not hold her long to-day. She returned to the charge.

"It is all very well for the rector and his wife, for they live four miles away, and their calling does not commit them to anything. In spite of their relationship they need never be on really intimate terms, but if we call upon her it is quite another matter—she will be one of our circle. There is no way out of it. We must invite her to our garden parties and 'At Homes,' and treat her completely as one of us. And our circle has always been so select!"

We had got no further than this when Mrs. Manners and Mrs. Welwyn dropped

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in. We continued to discuss the momentous question. The only thing we were all agreed about was that if we once called upon Mrs. Greenlaw there could be no drawing back on our side—our Shakespeare readings, our sewing-meetings, our teaparties, and singing-practices must all be open to her, and it was little wonder we hesitated when we thought of her beautiful figure and red hair, and reflected on the fact that she was living apart from her husband.

"After all, she can do us no harm," said Mrs. Manners kindly.

"I am not so sure of that," remarked Mrs. Peacock.

And then, naturally enough, we began to talk about red hair, a subject upon which it seems every one has strong views. We were all quite unanimous in saying that it "meant something," but as to just what it did mean we could not agree in the least. Mrs. Manners was of opinion that it indicated bad temper—she had had a housemaid with bright gold hair, and she had quarrelled so dreadfully with the cook and had spoken so rudely to Mr. Manners that

she had had to get rid of her. Mrs. Welwyn, whose hair looks auburn in some lights, said that golden-haired women were sweet-tempered and easily put upon. Mrs. Peacock said they were clever and often very designing, while I held that they were gloomy but inclined to be impulsive.

"Absurd!" said Mrs. Peacock. "I speak from recent experience. My last governess before this one was not a bit of a pessimist. She was an extremely lively

and artful girl. If you only knew!"

We all knew about "Toute Moralité's" predecessor. Mrs. Peacock had told each one of us in confidence how she had been always in the surgery, how she had shamefully neglected the children, and what an interest Dr. Peacock had taken in her because she was interested in medical science! It was surprising, he said, what that girl knew!

"People with red hair are designing," persisted Mrs. Peacock. "They are always dreadfully designing."

"Well," I said, "I cannot agree with you. Howard's uncle's first wife was simply the dullest and most melancholy person I ever knew—I am ready to admit that Howard's uncle may have had something to do with that, still the fact remains—and her hair was the only bright spot about her."

"I said so," said Mrs. Welwyn. "She allowed herself to be put upon because she

was sweet-tempered."

"Absurd!" said Mrs. Peacock. "I have never known any one with red hair who was not clever and designing—never!"

"And I have never known any one who was not hot-tempered," put in Mrs. Manners.

"I admit they may be impulsive," I said, "but—"

At this point our discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. and Miss Green, and though we were impatient at first at the interruption, our feelings of annoyance quickly changed to those of the keenest interest when the curate remarked in his sententious manner:

"We have just been calling upon your new neighbour, Mrs. Howard-Jones."

"A most interesting woman," said Miss Green.

- "A distant cousin of our rector's," remarked her brother.
- "We were just talking about calling on her when you came in," Mrs. Peacock said briskly.

"Her house is quite in order, and so artistic," said Miss Green. "She takes a great interest in literature, too, and was delighted at the idea of Browning readings next winter."

I glanced at Mrs. Peacock to see how she bore having the matter of admitting or excluding the newcomer to our society taken out of her hands in this manner. She showed no sign of annoyance, and the curate went on to remark:

"Such a cultured lady! Quite an acquisition to our little circle. Hers must be a lonely life, through no fault of her own, I am sure." He waved his hand. "I hope we shall all do what we can to make her feel at home among us. I feel confident we shall."

He spoke as though he had just lately created her, and was thoroughly satisfied with his handiwork.

"I am going to call upon her this very

afternoon," said Mrs. Peacock, rising with alacrity.

She hurried off so eagerly that she forgot the chiffon ruffle which would have rendered her appearance so much more impressive to a stranger, and would have taken her only a very few moments to have fetched from her house.

In the course of the next few days we all called upon Mrs. Greenlaw and, on comparing notes, we discovered that she was a lady of many sides. Mrs. Peacock found her interested in the bringing-up of children, and particularly interested in Dr. Peacock's methods. Mrs. Welwyn found her a ready listener when she talked about the village butcher, the weather, and her husband's prospective book, and she was delighted when that well-dressed lady admired the cut of her skirt. Mrs. Greenlaw readily entered into the different characteristics of Mrs. Manners' seven children, and she gave her several valuable hints on the treatment of rheumatism.

I was anxious to have Aunt Jane's opinion of the newcomer, but Aunt Jane, it appears, has not called upon her, in spite of

the example of the clergy of the neighbour-hood, and in spite of the fact that Mrs. Greenlaw is ready to throw herself into the scheme for turning the curate into a vicar—a scheme in which Aunt Jane feels the kindliest interest—though she may not always approve of Mr. Green's sermons. Mrs. Greenlaw has already suggested various ingenious ways of making money at bazaars, and we intend inviting her to a meeting to discuss the matter in a friendly way before long.

She quickly discovered the interest which I take in gardening, and began to ask my advice about her flower-beds and the best method of dealing with the bare places in the privet hedge. And to Dick and Amabelle she has been really charming, allowing them to pick her flowers and knock about her croquet-balls to their heart's content.

Howard seems much amused, for some reason, at the whole affair, and when he comes home in the evenings, one of his first inquiries is usually:

"Well, and how goes it with the curate and the siren?"

"The curate," I said this evening, "has gone away for a few days to visit a maiden aunt. The siren, as you call her, is not at all well, and has called in Dr. Peacock."

Howard whistled.

"How can you say such things?" I exclaimed, and I left him to go and see the children, who were in bed, each of them firmly clasping an India-rubber animal given them by Mrs. Greenlaw.

When I came down again I said:

"You have never told me what Mr. Greenlaw is like. I want to know."

"Oh, I believe he is not much to look at—past middle age, stoutish, bald, a good, solid, respectable sort of chap!"

"Not much imagination or sense of hu-

mour, I suppose?" I remarked.

"Well, no, from what I have heard you could hardly accuse him of that!" Howard said, laughing.

"Whatever made him marry Mrs.

Greenlaw?" I asked.

"I don't know. I daresay he thought that she would look well at the head of his table, and entertain his friends with her superior liveliness. But as far as I can gather she and her particular friends proved a good deal too lively for Greenlaw and his circle. Evidently they did not hit it off. I fancy his imagination lies somewhere under his waistcoat, and where hers is I am not prepared to say."

I laughed.

- "She has money of her own, and they separated by mutual agreement, I am told," he added.
- "Whatever made her marry him?" I asked.
- "Oh, that is beyond me!" Howard said carelessly. "Why does any one marry any one? Why did God make men male and female?"
 - "I wish he hadn't," I said gloomily.
- "You would not have liked a world of women only, would you, Catherine?"
- "I should, very much," I retorted. "Certainly I would have made only one sex, and that female, if I had been creating the world, or else perhaps I would have made several sexes—say half a dozen. Then there might have been some variety instead of this endless monotony, this same old tune of male and female over and over

again. It is so deceptive, too, for every time one hears it in a different key or on a different instrument, one is led to imagine that it is something fresh."

"At least it is an air with variations," Howard said, sitting down by me and trying to take the sewing out of my hands.

"I don't like the variations," I said, shrugging my shoulders, "and I don't want to be talked to as if I were a woman!"

"You are not a woman then," he said in a conciliating tone. "You are something much better—a human being. In fact, I always think of you as a fellow-creature first and a woman afterward."

"Now you are really nice," I said, putting down my sewing voluntarily, and like a woman—giving him both my hands.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. GREENLAW INQUIRES THE CHARACTER OF A SERVANT OF MRS. PEACOCK

"There is nothing makes a man suspect much, more than to know little."—Bacon.

I HAVE grown a little tired of the ordinary straight frocks that little girls wear, and so I have for once taken the lead and procured a fresh pattern for Amabelle. I told Mrs. Peacock about it yesterday, and she came in directly after lunch this afternoon to help me about cutting out the frock and to cut one for her little girl, who is the same age as mine, at the same time. Her Swiss governess, "Toute Moralité," can sew remarkably well, but she is so unable to follow the directions given on an English flat pattern that Mrs. Peacock has to set her superior intellect to work when it is a question of anything new. The pattern in hand, however, proved too much for such intellects as we possess.

We started gaily enough, spreading out our material on the table, while I unfolded the pattern, piece after piece.

"I think there is some mistake about this—I am sure there is a whole family of patterns here," I said, feeling that I could never cope with such a number of pieces.

"Never mind; read out the directions, and we shall soon see," said Mrs. Peacock, nothing daunted.

I read: "This simple little frock consists of fourteen pieces."

"Quite right," said Mrs. Peacock, still cheerful. "There are just fourteen here. Now the directions for cutting."

I went on reading:

"Cut the lining-front, full-front, front-yoke, and front-gore with the edges having a triple perforation on a lengthwise fold, and the full back and back-yoke with their back-edges, the back-gore with the edge having a single notch, the wrist-band with its long edges, and the other parts with the line of small single perforations lengthwise of the goods."

I paused for breath.

Mrs. Peacock placed her elbows on the

table, pressed her hands to her forehead, and remained motionless, plunged in thought.

"I wish I had had a mathematical training," she said at last.

"Mathematics are no use; it is only common sense that is required," I said, growing more cheerful as Mrs. Peacock became depressed. "I think we had better ignore the directions, spread all the pieces on the material, cut them out, and trust to common sense to put them together after. It will be as good as a Chinese puzzle."

"I am sure we ought to think it all out first," said Mrs. Peacock, and she remained in the same thoughtful attitude, muttering to herself: "Front-gore, front-yoke, backedges. Single perforations!" and so on.

"Why can't somebody translate the thing into English? This is an American pattern, and I suppose the language is American," I said, taking great pleasure in arranging and fitting the pieces as closely as possible on the material as I spoke. "My brain is not equal to fathoming the directions, and besides, as you see, I haven't read half of them yet."

Mrs. Peacock read the printed matter over again very carefully.

"Well, let us follow your plan," she said desperately. "The only thing that is clear to me is that we shall want two of each of the pieces. That will be twenty-eight—or will it be twenty-seven?"

"What can a poor little child want her frock in twenty-eight pieces for? We shall have to sew them all together again, you know. It looked such a simple little thing in the picture!" I said.

"You must have the pieces the right way of the stuff," said Mrs. Peacock, picking up the fragments I had so carefully placed on the cloth, and rearranging them.

When she had done this to her satisfaction and we had pinned them on, we threw our whole souls into the cutting of them out. Mrs. Peacock's plump face was all puckered up into a frown, and her jaw moved slightly with every snip of her scissors.

I was determined to be accurate for once, and I measured half-inch turnings with the utmost care, but unfortunately we both forgot to cut notches in the stuff as the pattern directed, and this made it extremely difficult to fit the twenty-eight pieces together in their proper order when we had finished cutting them out. We concentrated our attention as far as we were able, and tried to use our common sense, but most of the pieces looked alike to our unpractised eyes, and we had made but little progress when the servant came in to ask if Mrs. Greenlaw might speak to Mrs. Peacock.

"Ask her in here," I said, welcoming the diversion. "She may be able to help us. And we shall come back fresher to it if we rest a little."

Mrs. Greenlaw came into the room, smiling serenely and looking perfectly fresh and unruffled.

"I am so sorry to disturb you," she said,
"but I have been to Mrs. Peacock's house
to inquire the character of a servant, and
as the matter is rather pressing, I thought
I might venture to follow her here."

"I am delighted," I said readily.

"You are the best of kind neighbours," Mrs. Greenlaw remarked in her most gracious manner.

"Not at all. I am always glad to see you. But shall I leave you with Mrs. Peacock?" I added, hoping to be answered in the negative.

"No, please don't go away," came from both ladies in one breath, and Mrs. Greenlaw sat down and began her inquiry after the approved manner of ladies who inquire the character of servants.

"I have had a parlour-maid applying for a situation—such a nice-looking girl—and she tells me she has lived with you for a year and a half, Mrs. Peacock. Ellen Sparks is her name."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peacock, putting on a very guarded air, "Sparks did live with me for eighteen months."

"Did you find her clean?" asked Mrs. Greenlaw.

"Fairly," said Mrs. Peacock, closing her mouth in a way that gave one clearly to understand that the truth and nothing more than the truth could be extracted from her.

"Is she honest?" inquired Mrs. Greenlaw. "As far as I know," answered Mrs. Peacock.

"Do you call her obliging?"

"I should not call her exactly obliging, but I should not like to say she was disobliging."

"Is she a good worker?"

"She can work very well when she likes," said Mrs. Peacock.

"Can she wait well at table, and does

she keep the silver looking nice?"

"Very fairly. I should say," said Mrs. Peacock in a judicial manner that seemed quite foreign to her, "that that is the kind of work she is best fitted for."

"Well, you are a cautious woman!"

laughed Mrs. Greenlaw.

"Cautious" is not a term I should ever have applied to Mrs. Peacock; but then I had never seen her in this light before, and I must say I was amazed at her reticence. I had thought Sparks a treasure—I knew that she had been accounted so some months before, for Mrs. Peacock was never tired then of singing her praises, and I had been expecting her to pour forth a flood of

information of a laudatory nature concerning her.

Mrs. Greenlaw continued to prosecute her inquiries.

"Is she good-tempered?"

"Well, no, I should not call her good-tempered. But then no really capable person is. I have always found good temper and incompetence synonymous in a servant," said Mrs. Peacock.

"She is really capable, then?" said Mrs. Greenlaw, quickly seizing the point. "You would advise me to take her?"

"You might do worse than try Ellen Sparks," Mrs. Peacock declared after a moment's consideration. "I am certain there are worse servants to be had."

Mrs. Greenlaw looked perplexed, and was evidently racking her brains for a really penetrating question. At last she said:

"I suppose you would take her back if

she applied to you again?"

"Take her back? I should think not!" said Mrs. Peacock, unable to sustain any longer her impartial attitude. "I would rather do the work twice over myself!"

"I thought she was a treasure," I put

in; "and I am sure she must have been a good servant—your house is always so spotless."

"Ah, you don't know what I went through with that girl, or what an amount

of looking after she required!

"She was so ungrateful, too," continued Mrs. Peacock, throwing off all reserve. "Dr. Peacock said she was anæmic and ought to get more air and exercise, so I sent her out every afternoon and gave her the money to hire a bicycle. And, would you believe it! she never went bicycling at all. What she did was to go and sit in the green-grocer's shop all the time that she was supposed to be out."

"And no doubt she told lies about it?"

said Mrs. Greenlaw sympathetically.

"Well, no, she did not exactly tell lies. But then, of course, I never thought of saying in so many words, 'Do you go and sit at the green-grocer's when you should be bicycling for your health?' But more than once I asked her if she had had a nice time out, and she said, 'Very nice, thank you, ma'am.' I don't know what you think, but I call that prevarication, for how could she

possibly have had a nice time at the greengrocer's, with the smell of stale cabbages and rotten apples, and nobody but a very plain green-grocer to talk to?"

Mrs. Greenlaw and I laughed, and Mrs. Peacock's face relaxed for a moment, but she immediately went on quite seriously:

"That wasn't all, for she went into hysterics and dropped the best dessert-service when her young man was ordered off to the war. And in the end she gave notice only because Harold, in his playful way, locked her in the pantry. I have come to the conclusion it is no use giving servants so much liberty. They do not understand it, and they take advantage of you."

We laughed again, but Mrs. Peacock saw nothing to laugh at.

"Well," said Mrs. Greenlaw, "the character you give the girl is not exactly perfect, but in these days it is, I believe, what one would call 'satisfactory,' and I shall engage her."

"I warn you, you will have trouble with her," Mrs. Peacock began with some warmth, and then, remembering herself, she went on in a more guarded manner. "Still, I think she would make a fair average servant if she would only exert herself."

"I am not really difficile, and the work will be extremely light," said Mrs. Greenlaw serenely. "I never interfere with my servants if they do their work properly."

"She will require a deal of looking after. She will never do anything without

it, I assure you."

Mrs. Greenlaw waved her hand as though to dismiss the subject. She had been watching me for some time wrestling helplessly with gores and yokes and wristbands, and she now said:

"I hope you will excuse me, dear Mrs. Howard-Jones, but you are putting those pieces together the wrong way up, and your yoke will turn into a frill if you join it like that."

"How kind of you to come to the rescue! We have been struggling for hours to understand the thing," I said, gladly passing the pattern over to her.

She seemed to know what to do at once, and in a very few minutes had sorted the pieces, pinned them together, and explained the whole pattern so that it could not fail to be clear to the meanest intelligence.

"What a clever woman!" I said admiringly to Mrs. Peacock when she had left us alone.

"I was just beginning to get the hang of the thing myself," said Mrs. Peacock. "It is really extraordinarily simple."

"Well, I know I should never have fathomed it, though it seems simple enough now. I am sure it requires a giant intellect to see through such a pattern at once."

"A giant intellect or the technical training of a dressmaker," remarked Mrs. Peacock dryly. "I cannot help thinking that Mrs. Greenlaw must have been a dressmaker at some period of her career. I am sure she must have been. Of course we know really nothing about her. She is so extremely guarded if one asks her a question that there seems no way of finding out. I said to her the other day, for example, 'How do you like Edenrise?' and she said:

"'Immensely. It is so exhilarating.'

"'A great change from London life, is it not?' I went on, hoping to find out if she

had been living in town, but all she said was:

"'Don't you think that every kind of life and every kind of place has its advantages if one looks at it in the right

spirit?'

"'Certainly,' I said. And when I asked her if she did not feel very lonely living in a house all by herself, she began quoting poetry about solitude or something of that sort. At least I supposed it was poetry because there seemed to be no sense in it. I daresay, however, she made it up to put me off."

I smiled, and Mrs. Peacock continued,

smiling herself:

"It is all very well to smile, but I dislike a mystery above all things, and I suspect a person who enters so readily into other people's affairs as Mrs. Greenlaw does, and keeps her own so extremely dark. Why, for instance, does she never mention her husband?"

"Well, I don't suppose you or I would talk much about our husbands under the same circumstances."

"But, what are the circumstances?"

"Incompatibility of temperament, I suppose," I said. "From what Howard says I gather her husband is a perfectly impossible person, and they simply agreed to live apart."

"Well," said Mrs. Peacock, returning cheerfully to a subject of which she had some little knowledge, "Sparks will never suit her if she really is a good housekeeper. I don't for a moment believe she is; and then, of course, she will let Sparks alone to follow her own devices, and you may imagine what a state things will be in! With all my trouble, I assure you that her work was constantly going back, and since I have had a new parlour-maid the house has been a different place. She asked directly she came for a particular kind of brush that would go into the corners, and she is so thorough."

I have often heard this sort of thing before from Mrs. Peacock and others, and I found it difficult to fix my attention.

The children came in, and I welcomed their appearance as a pleasant diversion, even though Amabelle was unusually fractious and we had to descend to bribes and almost to physical force to induce her to stand still to see how the frock suited her.

"I should give her a little dose of medicine to-night if I were you," Mrs. Peacock remarked in a loud whisper.

Amabelle had retired to sulk in a corner and had, of course, taken in the remark, for

I heard her muttering to herself:

"Naughty lady! naughty lady! My mother is good, my mother is not naughty. She never gives good little girls nasty medicine! Naughty, naughty lady!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE JOYS OF GARDENING AND THE DISAD-VANTAGES OF A PRIVET HEDGE

Il n'y a rien au monde plus sage que de faire un beau jardin."—Anatole France.

I USED to think before I began to take a personal interest in gardening myself, that my friends who did were the most unmitigated bores—worse even than golfers or cyclists—and gardens always bored me in proportion to the interest their proprietors took in them, and in proportion also to their extent and to the number of peach-houses, vineries, and ferneries.

"If amateur gardeners would only let one alone!" I used to think when I followed Dr. Peacock round his garden, reluctantly counting his rosebuds and admiring his rockeries. "I daresay I should think it quite a nice garden if I were not obliged to say so!" Then I would artfully admire a particular rosebud, but I soon found that that was no use, for he was certain to give me something very full blown—on the point of falling, in fact—and I was obliged to abandon myself to boredom pure and simple until I could find an excuse for leaving.

Now, however, I have entirely changed my point of view, for I, as well as almost all the housewives of Edenrise, have taken seriously to horticulture. Dr. Peacock leaves the garden to his wife and confines his attentions to his bicycle and his motorcar. Elizabeth and her German Garden first inspired us with the desire to try our hands, I think, though (as Mrs. Peacock remarked) it was very different for Elizabeth with money and men at her command, and the stimulating absence of her "man of wrath." We have critical husbands, jobbing gardeners, and cheap packets of seed to contend with. And yet with all these difficulties, to which must be added the natural interest which children take in gardening and the passion their fathers have for pruning-in spite of such drawbacks, some of us have made our gardens a joy to the eye-of the proprietor, at any rate.

I am trying very hard at present to teach Dick and Amabelle the difference between weeds and seedlings, though I must admit that I am somewhat perplexed myself, for weeds, when you have once interfered with them, have such a crafty way of altering their appearance to look like the seedlings you most cherish! "Protective mimicry," Howard calls it, and I call it vegetable cunning! But weeds are not so troublesome as snails, for they eat everything, and the smaller they are the more they devour. A little time ago we collected a large number in a pail, tried them by special jury, and condemned them to death by drowning. Imagine our surprise when we found a little later that they had all escaped, for they are, it seems, amphibious! Amabelle was delighted at their cleverness. and she cried bitterly when we applied salt to the next pailful, while Dick watched them squirm and bubble with what I felt to be a morbid fascination. There seems no help for it now but to take them to the garden-paling and throw them as far as we can across the road into the field beyond, hoping they may never return. We hope in vain, however! Few four-footed animals are in reality so fleet as the snail, and we find that those, which do not get into Mrs. Greenlaw's garden by mistake, are back again in ours and feasting on the roses and lilies almost before we can look round! We are sure they are the same ones, because fresh full-grown snails could not appear with such rapidity.

Slugs we never interfere with; we ignore their existence. They are like evil

thoughts, best not spoken of.

Gardening, I find, is an excellent occupation for a housewife, for, though it may break one's back and bore one's friends, it keep one's mind from dwelling too much on domestic details within doors. It is so full of surprises too, and the essence of good husbandry is to take advantage of surprises. One can never tell what will happen next! For instance, one sows mignonette and reaps wild forget-me-not; one scatters parsley-seed and is rewarded with a potato-plant! One learns to grasp unexpected opportunities; and it was a proud moment for Dick and Amabelle and me when we dined off our surprise potatoes.

I observe also that if one takes a deal of trouble to cultivate single flowers they become double, and if you have a border of double daisies they infallibly become single.

It is not only in my garden that these things happen, for Mrs. Manners and Mrs. Peacock have remarked the same thing. We often meet to compare notes and to pore over seed catalogues together. Nothing is more fascinating. The names alone excite the imagination, and I used at first to choose my flowers almost entirely for their names. It is impossible to me to believe that a rose would smell as sweet if you called it a calceolaria, or a lily of the valley would be as attractive if you called it a petunia. And such names as Herb-Paris, Love-in-a-mist, Sweet-sultan, and Solomon's-seal I consider quite a garden in themselves.

Mrs. Peacock laughed at me, and so I reluctantly gave up that plan, and have since turned my attention to trying to discover what will really grow and do me credit, irrespective of pleasant-sounding names. I have had my reward, and I wish

you could see my garden now. I insist on my friends counting the daffodils and the irises, and I give them bunches of wall-flower so soon as it has gone to seed at the lower part of the stalk, and I do this without the least compunction, for I know that the ladies who come professedly to admire my flowers come quite as much to look through the gaps in the privet hedge to see what Mrs. Greenlaw is doing next door.

Naturally enough, that lady inspires us with admiration not unmixed with envy. She is one of us, but with a difference—a housewife with no cares. She has no children to dress or to send off to school in the mornings, no husband to conciliate when he comes home tired in the evenings. "She toils not, neither does she spin." Money seems no object to her, and while we dig in our gardens she waves her hand and her gardener makes her borders blossom like the rose with plants from Covent Garden. While we are wrestling with our servants or cooking in the kitchen, she is playing croquet with the curate or spending the day in town.

We are all a little envious of her, I think, 105 except, perhaps, Mrs. Manners, who regards her with genuine pity. She was with me in my garden a day or so ago when Mrs. Greenlaw was sitting alone in hers.

"I am so sorry for a woman who is all alone in the world like that," she remarked, nodding her head in Mrs. Greenlaw's direction.

"Think what a delightfully free time she has!" I said. "She can do absolutely anything she feels inclined."

"One quickly tires of that sort of thing," said Mrs. Manners with conviction. "I can remember the time when I was free to do what I liked, and I don't regret it, I can assure you. If she only had a child I should not be so sorry for her."

I believe Mrs. Manners to be incapable of envy, and Mrs. Welwyn admires Mrs. Greenlaw so much that she hardly envies her at all; while Mrs. Peacock, who is of a much more suspicious disposition, envies far more than she admires her. Still, there is not one of us who has not unhesitatingly taken her side with regard to her matrimonial affairs, though we have, of course, no means of knowing the true state of the

case. Mrs. Welwyn is particularly sympathetic, and she was evidently drawn to Mrs. Greenlaw in the first place because she supposed that her difficulties with her husband were of the same nature as her own. She hinted as much to me, expressing at the same time the greatest admiration for the way in which Mrs. Greenlaw seems to bear her solitary life. The two, I can see, are in a fair way to becoming fast friends.

Mrs. Peacock takes a livelier interest in my garden and comes to see me much oftener than usual now I have such a fascinating neighbour. I feel sure she comes partly in the hope of being introduced to Mrs. Greenlaw's brother (an actor, reported to be of some repute in his profession), whom Aunt Jane and I first saw with her on a Sunday morning before she had settled among us, and whom we occasionally see in the garden and on his way to and from the station. He has not yet been introduced into Edenrise society, and Mrs. Peacock intends to be presented to him or know the reason why!

Yesterday, when she was admiring my peony buds, I could not help wishing that

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the privet hedge between the gardens had been twice as high and twice as thick as it is, for, unfortunately, instead of the actorbrother, Mrs. Peacock perceived her own husband, Dr. Peacock, in the thick of a game of croquet with Mrs. Greenlaw, when she supposed him to be miles away, attending an urgent case. As soon as she caught sight of him she ceased to take the slightest interest in my peony buds (she even said she hoped they might not prove to be magenta); and she coughed so ominously that Dr. Peacock had to come in and explain that it was entirely the fault of his motorcar that he happened to be in Mrs. Greenlaw's garden playing croquet. The miserable thing had stuck fast on a hill and had refused to move, so that Dr. Dale had arrived from the neighbouring town and had secured the patient while he was still struggling with its works.

"A good patient lost," said Mrs. Peacock reproachfully.

"And a game of croquet into the bargain," said Dr. Peacock, declining to take the matter seriously.

"It's not as if it were only one patient 108

lost; it's their first baby," continued Mrs. Peacock gloomily. And I knew that her imagination was running riot, picturing the arrival of innumerable babies, while Dr. Peacock remained tied to a motor-car, and Dr. Dale not only assisted at their entrance into the world, but prescribed for all the ailments attendant on their passage through it.

I felt that I must say something to change the subject, and, seeking about in my mind for a topic, tactlessly tried to turn the conversation by asking Dr. Peacock if he considered Mrs. Greenlaw's health to be really improving. Mrs. Peacock came as near sniffing as such a well-bred woman can when he answered:

"Yes, yes, she is better, much better; but she is nervous and wants to be taken out of herself. A sensitive woman like that, living alone, having no doubt been badly treated by her husband, is bound to suffer, physically as well as mentally. But she is better, much better. Rest and quiet is all she wants, and a little mild distraction."

[&]quot;Such as croquet," I said.

"Oh, yes, croquet is a help, a great help. An excellent thing for a nervous patient."

"I believe, though, that to play it well you have to work your brains quite hard."

"Not if you play with me," said the doc-

tor, laughing in his genial way.

Mrs. Peacock picked an iris and actually began to tear off its petals, one by one, before my eyes.

"Supposing you go in and have a game with her, my dear?" Dr. Peacock said, turning to his wife. "It would be very good for you, and I am sure Mrs. Greenlaw would be delighted.—Wouldn't she, Mrs. Howard-Jones?"

"I am sure she would," I said, but Mrs. Peacock maintained a rigid silence, and he

rose to go, remarking cheerfully:

"Well, I must be off, much as I should like to stay and chat with you ladies. How beautiful your garden is looking, Mrs. Howard-Jones! I am sure you must be proud of it."

"I am," I said, feeling pleased and flattered, and I began to point out some of my peculiar treasures as I accompanied him through the garden to the house. "What do you think of my sweet-brier?" I asked, but he hurried along, paying but scant attention, and I was soon obliged to return to Mrs. Peacock.

She sighed heavily as I sat down by her, and said:

"I suspected that woman from the first."

"What do you suspect her of?" I asked.

"She is certainly very attractive."

"She may be. I am not so sure about that," said Mrs. Peacock. "But she should go somewhere where there is more scope for her attractions and not settle in a place like Edenrise. I tell you this, that if Mr. Green is not very careful he will compromise himself with her. I have hinted as much to his sister, but she seems infatuated with the woman and her literary acquirements. No doubt her husband has behaved shamefully to her, but it is possible to carry sympathy too far."

"I do not think Mrs. Greenlaw will do Mr. Green any serious harm," I said. "In fact, she may do him good—enlarge his mind, and so on. He is only consoling himself with her after having been refused by the county member's daughter. It is not serious, and croquet helps, you know; croquet helps immensely!"

Mrs. Peacock laughed, and her ill-humour disappeared directly I led her back to the more congenial topic of the education of our children, although she confessed that she was a good deal worried about Harold. "Toute Moralité," she told me, had given notice to leave, because he had poured water down her back and treacle over her hair. She had wept copiously "in her foreign way," Mrs. Peacock said, and declared that treacle was more than flesh and blood could bear. Indeed, she showed so much feeling that Mrs. Peacock realized the force of the provocation which made the long-suffering person think of leaving Edenrise and her amorous chemist. She was even considering sending Harold to school. I smiled, wondering whether Harold had been actuated by a "reasonable childish impulse." Mrs. Peacock, however, put it down to "high spirits." Her children are never really naughty, and if they do any little thing which appears to other

people to be naughty it is "simply the result of high spirits."

"I say to mademoiselle, as I said to the nurse who complained that Harold kicked her, he is not the first little boy who has acted in such a manner," Mrs. Peacock said, feeling, I could see, slightly aggrieved that these little pleasantries should not be more appreciated.

I cannot help deploring at times the fact that the maternal instinct seems so incompatible with a sense of humour. Mrs. Peacock is not lacking in humour in a general way, but where her children are concerned she has not a vestige, and I must say that I fail to see the fun in some of my own children's escapades that would probably strike me as extremely funny if I were not their mother.

Mrs. Peacock and I talked long and seriously before we finally decided that Harold should go to boarding-school, and I was ready enough to fall in with her suggestion that Dick and Amabelle should share her little girl's lessons with the governess, for, to tell the truth, Dick is getting a little beyond me. His questions on natural history.

and geography are altogether of too penetrating a nature for me, though I have been reading Darwin's Origin of Species and Huxley's Physiography with a view to coping with him.

"Do you think it is a good plan for the children to have lessons of 'Toute Moralité' with the little Peacock girls?" I asked Howard in the evening.

"I leave the matter entirely to you, Catherine," he said. "I don't think they will learn too much from 'Toute Moralité,' and that is an excellent thing."

"You ought to take more interest in their education," I remarked severely.

"I believe in letting them educate themselves, and I always hope that they will educate us at the same time if we give them a free hand," he said.

"I daresay you mean that for a joke," I replied, "but I have never heard you make a more sensible remark! I have learned all sorts of virtues already from those children, and so might you if you would only take the trouble."

CHAPTER IX

CHIEFLY ABOUT JEALOUSY

"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster that doth mock The meat it feeds on."—Shakespeare.

I CANNOT tell why Howard seems to have conceived such a prejudice against Mrs. Greenlaw. His knowledge of her relations with her husband is too slight to warrant it, and I am sure she always treats him with marked consideration; yet when she appears in her garden Howard secretes himself in a secluded corner of ours. When she looks through a gap in the hedge and asks him, with a fascinating smile, to play croquet, he lies and says he does not understand the game. I dragged him in a day or so ago because I thought it was his duty to be more neighbourly, but I shall not do it again, for, though he won the game, he seemed to me to be barely civil, and the only explanation he offered afterward was

that he did not want to play croquet—he wanted to talk to me. As if he had not plenty of opportunities of doing that! Men are such strange creatures, and it is a matter of constant wonder to me how many of them seem to care only for those women who are dull and domestic and good. If I were a man I know I should hover round a clever, attractive woman like Mrs. Greenlaw, and never look at a dull, good woman like myself! I do not for a moment mean to imply that Mrs. Greenlaw is not good, but I am quite sure that besides being unfortunate, she is singularly attractive. moves with such grace, and she has such a way of treating each individual she encounters as though her whole life were centred in that person at the moment, that, though I may realize that she treats the butcher and the milkman in the same manner, I, for one, cannot help feeling flattered.

"O Mrs. Howard-Jones," she will say if I have not seen her for a day or two, "how I have been hungering for a sight of you! And won't you come in and have tea

with me?"

And she will look at me in such a win-116

ning manner and seem so earnest about it that I feel it would be nothing short of brutal to refuse. Dick and Amabelle are quite fascinated by her, and I have to spend a great deal of time in hunting them out of her garden. Often enough when I think I have secured them and set them to work to weed or rake the paths, one or other of them will escape, and I see the siren receiving them once more with open arms. It is a difficult position for me, and, much as I dislike barbed wire, I am afraid I shall be obliged to use it to fill in those gaps in the privet hedge.

Howard says children ought to be obedient without barbed wire, but then he is not a mother, and fathers do not understand or follow the workings of their queer little minds as we do. I used to maintain to him that our children were not spoiled, but now I tell him that spoiled children turn out much better than those who are constantly thwarted; and I instance the little Welwyns, whose lives are made a burden to them by being constantly told not to do things that are right and natural for them to do.

I have often tried to point out to their mother that too much care is really bad for children, but she has never paid any attention, and I am sure she considers me a reckless and indulgent sort of mother, whose children are bound to come to a bad end. Mrs. Greenlaw might give her some useful advice on the subject, for that lady exerts such a powerful influence over her at present that she could do almost anything with her. Besides, I have often observed that mothers are far more ready to listen to advice about the training of children from single or childless women than from other mothers.

In any case Mrs. Welwyn is so absorbed in her friendship with Mrs. Greenlaw that her children are left in comparative peace. One sees now and then such sudden, absorbing attachments between two women, founded on an attraction as strong as and more difficult to understand than that felt by a man and a woman, who, as it is termed, "fall in love" with one another. Though why we should say "fall in love" as we say "fall into sin" or "into temptation," I fail to see; unless, perhaps, the phrase is a relic

from the days when the celibate life was considered the ideal life, marriage a necessary evil, and "falling in love" synonymous with falling into sin. It would be interesting to know how much of this feeling still survives, and how many people continue to regard the natural expression of love as a concession to their lower natures. One ponders over and theorizes about such subjects, but they are quite beyond the pale of my actual knowledge. And, after all, it is just as interesting for me to see that Mrs. Welwyn, who has found so little satisfaction in her married life, has thrown her whole soul into this new attraction, and would, I believe, go to the uttermost ends of the earth if Mrs. Greenlaw only wished it.

I have had plenty of opportunities of watching Mrs. Welwyn and her growing friendship for Mrs. Greenlaw through the privet hedge, but I have had very little opportunity of any private conversation with her since the day when she told me her troubles, until last night, when she and her husband came to dinner with us.

I was alone with her in the garden for

a short time after dinner when Howard and Mr. Welwyn were smoking in the diningroom. It was a warm evening, as warm as summer, though we are only at the beginning of May. A ruddy glow lingered in the west. The moon, almost full, was hidden behind the trees, but its light was fast gaining upon the daylight.

We strolled up and down, talking of the weather, admiring the sky, the fresh green of the budding trees, and congratulating ourselves upon the lengthening days. And having exhausted such general topics, an embarrassing silence fell between us. I broke it at last by a question concerning her relations with her husband.

"Oh, it's just the same! I can't do anything!" she answered impatiently, and with such evident unwillingness to enter further into the matter, that I said no more.

Her eyes wandered continually in the direction of Mrs. Greenlaw's garden, and I soon became aware of the sound of low voices coming from the other side of the hedge, and, stopping a moment to look through a gap, I perceived the red glow of a lighted cigar, and then, as the moon rose

above the trees, I saw Mrs. Greenlaw's graceful figure stand out white against the dark background of the evergreen oak.

She stood for a moment in front of the smoker, who was seated in the shadow of the trees, and then she sat down by his side.

"Isn't she beautiful?" said Mrs. Welwyn fervently, clasping my arm.

"Yes," I answered, in a rather doubtful tone, for Mrs. Greenlaw's beauty puzzles me. Her attraction seems to me to be so much in her manner and in her complete faith in her own charms. I do not think her so pretty as Mrs. Welwyn, for instance, but she has in perfection that rare gift, which some women who are not actually beautiful possess, of impressing the world with the fact of their beauty. It may be that when one looks at some beautiful people one is more struck by some mental or moral quality in them than by their physical charms. It is so, I know, with Mrs. Welwyn, who is too timid to do herself justice. Other people take her at her own estimate, as they take Mrs. Greenlaw at hers.

"I think she is perfectly lovely," re-

peated Mrs. Welwyn, and after a pause she said:

"I did not know her brother was coming to-night."

"They seem on excellent terms. You know him, of course?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't go when I know he is there. I would so much rather see her alone," Mrs. Welwyn said. "Have you been introduced to him?"

"Just through the hedge," I answered, "and I was attracted by his pleasant voice—voices often appeal to me more strongly than faces. Mrs. Peacock is extremely anxious to be introduced to him, and to have the pleasure of introducing him to Edenrise society," I continued, laughing.

"His time is so much taken up," Mrs. Welwyn said. "He cannot come often, and when he does come he comes to see her, not to see Edenrise society. Men hate teaparties and things like that!"

"Of course. I understand. Why should she introduce him if she doesn't wish to?" I said.

"Naturally he wants to see her, for nobody who really knew Mrs. Greenlaw could possibly help loving her," said Mrs. Welwyn fervently.

Howard and Mr. Welwyn came out into the garden, and we talked no more of Mrs. Greenlaw and her doings except for a few moments when Mr. Welwyn again turned the conversation in her direction.

"Do you see much of your neighbour?" he asked, when Howard and Mrs. Welwyn were at a little distance from us.

"We are on very good terms," I answered, "but I do not know her so well as Mrs. Welwyn does."

"Ella has taken a very great fancy to her. She seems to me to be quite a nice woman," he said, a little doubtfully. And then, after a slight pause, he asked:

"Do you know the cause of her being

separated from her husband?"

"I don't think it is a legal separation," I replied. "They seem to have parted by mutual consent, and from what Howard says about her husband I should think she was very much better without him."

"He ought not to allow her to live alone, especially in a place like this, where people gossip so," he remarked with decision.

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"I am sure we gossip very little," I said, standing up for Edenrise as in duty bound. "Not nearly as much as they do in other places. And if I had quarrelled with my husband—"I stopped.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Oh, I should certainly keep away; settle in a place like this and wait for him to come and make advances to me. It is much the best plan. Howard always has to make advances when we disagree," I said lightly.

"Even if you happen to be in the

wrong?"

"More than ever in that case! I never can own myself in the wrong unless he first admits—" I broke off. Howard and Mrs. Welwyn were within hearing, and I was suddenly conscious of having said something quite different to Mrs. Welwyn when she asked my advice a little time ago.

"One has to tell so many untruths in order to convey a really truthful impression," I said to myself in excuse of the apparent contradiction, as we went indoors to play whist.

Mr. Welwyn, who talks a great deal in 124

the ordinary way, was unusually silent during the evening, his wife unusually talkative, and on several occasions his eyes sought mine. I could not divine his thoughts, but I have an idea that he is beginning to be jealous of Mrs. Greenlaw's influence over Mrs. Welwyn, and this falls in with my theory that men are more often jealous of their wives' women friends nowadays than of their friends of the other sex. They are somehow suspicious of strong feminine attachments and a little envious of them, because they know that one woman understands another, in certain subtle ways, far better than the most sympathetic man can do.

Real jealousy—"the green-eyed monster," so vividly painted by poets and dramatists—no longer exists, I believe, in polite society. It is as extinct as the monsters of the Tertiary age, whose bones alone remain to give us some idea of their extraordinary proportions. One still reads in the newspapers of jealousy as a motive for crime, and one may gather some faint notion of the force of a passion which has left behind it traditions so powerful that a self-

respecting man still feels it incumbent on him to punish an unfaithful wife or mistress and her lover with death; though in nine cases out of ten his personal feelings do not prompt him to such a desperate act of retribution. It is not so much jealousy as a passion for decorum. Our modern attitude of mind is so different from the old that jealousy like Othello's is almost beyond our comprehension, and I cannot help feeling myself that the Moor must have been conscious of the humorous side of the matter when he says, after he has strangled Desdemona:

"When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
. . . Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well."

Love nowadays may be more sympathetic and less blind than of old, or our keener feelings may be entirely smothered by convention. In any case, such jealousy is beyond us at Edenrise. Mrs. Welwyn does not entertain the passion, and I am sure I should never be so unwise as to indulge it so far as to seek to revenge myself on Howard or on any woman with whom he

happened to fall in love. We are all, I know, superficially fickle, but habits of sympathy and affection bind ordinary people together far more firmly than they suspect. Dr. Peacock may be irresistibly attracted to Mrs. Greenlaw, but Mrs. Peacock knows that there is no cause for real jealousy, and she is jealous only in the petty, modern way. She dislikes Mrs. Greenlaw, and would prefer her husband to devote all his spare time to her amusement, and not waste any of it in flirting or in playing croquet with Mrs. Greenlaw. She is jealous, too, of that lady's social gifts.

Mr. Welwyn is jealous. He would like, I think, to fill the place in his wife's affections which Mrs. Greenlaw now fills. I may be wrong, but I believe he would make advances if his pride would only allow him, and he would be quite prepared to make concessions to her if she would only approach him in the right spirit. But Mrs. Welwyn is too much taken up with Mrs. Greenlaw at present to think very much about her relations with her husband.

Miss Green is beginning to be jealous of Mrs. Greenlaw because she recognises that she is far cleverer and more attractive than she is herself, and she has lately made the discovery that her brother spends too much time over the effeminate and wholly unsuitable game of croquet on her lawn.

"Should you be jealous if I were to become such inseparable friends with Mrs. Greenlaw as Mrs. Welwyn is?" I asked Howard last night after the Welwyns had gone.

"Certainly not," he answered a little too promptly. "But then you would not strike up such an absurd friendship. You are a sensible woman."

"It does not please me to be called a sensible woman," I said, "for I know that it implies a reflection of some sort. It is almost as bad as 'estimable' or 'clean, honest, and industrious' applied to a female, or 'a good husband' to a man. One knows that in those cases the persons so described are lacking in all the other virtues. But supposing I were not a sensible woman, and were to contract a violent friendship, do you think that you would not be jealous?"

Howard smiled and shook his head.

"You see, one has to care a good deal for a person to be really jealous of her," he remarked.

"Oh, there I cannot agree with you at all," I said, "for my theory is that you have to care very little to be jealous and a great deal to be incapable of jealousy."

"What nonsense you talk!" he said, laughing. "You are getting altogether out

of your depth."

"Very well," I said meekly. "Let us talk of flannel petticoats and camphor pilules."

CHAPTER X

AMONG THE BUTTERCUPS

"What have the meads to do with thee,
Or with thy youthful hours?
Live thou at court, where thou mayst be
The queen of men—not flowers."

Herrick.

The meadows round Edenrise are really beautiful, especially now in the springtime, and I look forward almost as eagerly as the children do to the mornings we spend together in the fields. No staid housewife could possibly go out alone, lie for an hour on the grass in the sunshine, and come home with arms full of flowers—it would be a perfectly scandalous proceeding. But if one takes one's children it becomes a proper, and even praiseworthy action, and I am able to enjoy myself accordingly. For even the most jaded housewife can rejoice in the vivid gold and green of a field of buttercups—as much, perhaps, as her children

can do. Mrs. Peacock, who is a most matter-of-fact person, will speak quite rapturously of such things sometimes, and Mrs. Manners, I know, is capable of fixing her eyes on the graceful outlines of a tree, or the colour of the evening sky, and of quite forgetting her seven children, her rheumatic husband, and all her household cares; while Mrs. Welwyn, though hardly what one would call a lover of nature, is fully alive to the beauty of moonlight effects. We think it foolish and affected to talk of the beauties of nature and to quote appropriaately from the poets, as Miss Green is wont to do, but the changing seasons never, I think, find us wholly unresponsive.

The fresh green of the early summer delights me now as much as in the winter the wonderful brownness of the whole country delighted me. The warm purplish brown of the winter landscape is as soothing to my eye as deep green in the glare of summer, and when I think of our English winter, frosty fields and snow-clad hills do not form part of my mental picture; I always call up the scene that my eyes have so often

rested upon here in my walks with the children. Brown trees with their delicate bare branches outlined against a sky of pale blue or brownish gray, a brown man leading a brown horse patiently drawing a cartload of brown faggots, while beyond rises a background of purplish-brown hills, their outlines mellowed by our soft English atmosphere. I rarely envy my friends their winters in sunnier climes.

"How much better we should be if we stayed at home and really observed our own surroundings instead of rushing through foreign countries!" Mrs. Peacock said last year, when she started for a six weeks' tour through France, Switzerland, Italy, and Holland. And as I strolled in the fields with the children I thought how much better her theory was than her practice; how much pleasanter it was to stay at home and endeavour to feel the charm of one's own countryside.

My favourite walk with the children is through steep path-fields. Beech-trees crown the summit of the hill, and the fields, now golden with buttercups, slope down to a little stream in the bottom, by whose side

one may find forget-me-nots and other plants that love the water.

This morning I took the little Welwyns with me as well as Dick and Amabelle, that I might have the pleasure of allowing them to do just as they liked without once telling them not to, and I sat down among the buttercups watching the four children at play. Dick and Roger Welwyn raced off to the stream, while Nancy and Amabelle wandered among the grass and flowers, gathering large bunches which they brought to me from time to time to keep. And as I watched them my heart ached, as a mother's heart is apt to do, that they should have to grow up into ordinary men and women and face a cold and callous world.

Presently Amabelle, who is curiously sympathetic sometimes, thinking, I suppose, that I was lonely, came and sat on my lap and began to tell me a story about a little tree whose mother-tree buttoned on its bark every morning and put a hat with waving green feathers on its head, and how the little tree wriggled and threw up its arms in the wind and said, "No, I won't be dressed! I won't be dressed!"

"Mummy, you are not listening," Amabelle said reproachfully, stopping suddenly.

It was true. I was not listening very attentively at that moment, for other voices had fallen upon my ear, and I leaned forward to try and catch the words. I could see nobody, but the words came quite clearly to me from below, spoken in a sonorous and familiar voice:

"Until I knew you I never knew what love really meant."

"Love comes to us in various forms," was the reply in a cheerful treble. And just at that moment I caught sight of Mr. Green and Mrs. Greenlaw a little below us on the other side of the hedge.

Mrs. Greenlaw, I thought, looked relieved as soon as she saw me. She came lightly over the stile and sat down at my side, while the curate eyed me rather anxiously.

"How quietly you came! You quite startled me!" I said, inwardly congratulating myself on my tact.

"I thought we were talking rather loudly," Mrs. Greenlaw remarked carelessly. "Mr. Green was telling me about his difficulties with the rector, and I feel it quite a disgrace to be even distantly related to such a 'low' and retrograde person—as the rector, I mean."

She laughed, and Mr. Green, instead of being shocked, as he ought to have been, looked admiringly down on her. The sun shone on her golden hair, and her silvergray dress looked charming among the buttercups.

"I shall stay here a little while with you, if I may," she said to me, glancing up at Mr. Green in a manner that he took to

mean dismissal.

"I wish I could stay too, but 'when duty calls,' "he began.

"I sit still and let her call," I put in.
"Why not try the same plan, Mr. Green?
Duty will keep perfectly well this weather."

He looked at me and smiled in his most condescending manner. Then, taking off his hat with a sweep, he turned and strode off down the field toward the village, without another word.

Amabelle had been sitting quite quietly all this time, her thoughts, I supposed, far

away with her little tree and its mothertree, but at this moment, to my horror, she remarked in her clear tones:

"Do you know Mr. Green is an ass, Mummy?"

"My dear child, whatever could put such an idea into your head?" I said as calmly as I could.

"Daddy says he is," she said solemnly, and as though that completely settled the question.

"It couldn't have been this Mr. Green that he meant," I said lamely. "And in any case, little girls should never repeat things."

I could see that Mrs. Greenlaw was with difficulty suppressing her merriment, though I tried not to look at her.

"I love donkeys," Amabelle went on fervently, "and asses too, 'cause I b'lieve they are the gentleman donkeys. Only I wish I knew why Daddy said Mr. Green was an ass."

"You see," I said triumphantly to Mrs. Greenlaw, "Amabelle does not use the word as a term of opprobrium, but rather as a term of endearment," forgetting that

that did not in the least excuse Howard—and I have so often told him to be more careful before the children. One would have thought that a legal training would have made him more cautious.

"Amabelle is a darling, and I am so glad to have found you both here!" Mrs. Greenlaw said, putting her arms round the child. "It is so pleasant to be in the fields with children. It brings one nearer to nature, and I am sure it expands one's sympathies."

Mrs. Greenlaw fixed her eyes pensively on the shining toe of her pointed shoe, and Amabelle, having rolled away down the sloping field, she went on: "Now, with Mr. Green one cannot help feeling that he carries the used-up air of the chapel-of-ease into the fields with him, and I keep expecting him to address me as 'dearly beloved brethren,' and to begin his remarks with 'I am sure we must all feel gratified.'"

"I can fancy I heard him saying to you just now, 'I am sure we must feel gratified at the sight of so many buttercups!'" I said, laughing and looking at her rather pointedly.

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She smiled responsively, but only said:

"Now Amabelle is so interesting, because one never knows what she will say next."

"Unfortunately not," I remarked feelingly.

We sat in silence for a few moments until we saw Mrs. Welwyn coming towards us from the top of the field, her figure looking very slight and girlish against the tender green on the beechtrees.

"My dear Ella!" said Mrs. Greenlaw, springing up.

"My dear Honora!" said Mrs. Welwyn, and they kissed each other on both cheeks, looking into one another's eyes.

"You could not trust me with the children?" I said reproachfully when I had greeted Mrs. Welwyn.

"It wasn't that, indeed, dear. I saw Honora go by our house, and I hoped I might find her by coming round the other way. I wanted so much to see her." She smiled contentedly as she sat down on the grass. "How lovely it is! And where is Mr. Green?"

"Duty called him and he went," said Mrs. Greenlaw, "leaving pleasure here."

"So like him," Mrs. Welwyn said, with

a sigh of satisfaction.

I got up and left them together, while I ran with Nancy and Amabelle down to the stream; and there we found the little boys exultant, their hats full of tadpoles, their clothes torn and muddy. I cast an anxious glance in the direction of Roger's mother, but she was quite oblivious; her back was turned to us and she was walking away up the hill, her hand clasped in Mrs. Greenlaw's.

When Howard made his usual inquiry for the curate and the siren in the evening, I said rather sharply:

"You spoke the truth for once when

you said Mr. Green was an ass."

Howard only laughed and said lightly: "I have often thought it, but have carefully

refrained from saying so."

"Then you should be careful of what you think when the children are present," I retorted. "Amabelle repeated your thought to Mrs. Greenlaw."

Howard whistled.

- "How you women and children do prattle!" he remarked.
- "Supposing"—I began after a pause, during which I was sewing a button on to his shirt-band and pricking the back of his neck rather ruthlessly—"supposing a clergyman of the Church of England were to marry a divorced woman. What would be the result? What would his bishop say, and what would happen to him?"

"Excommunication, transubstantiation, all that sort of thing, I suppose," he said gaily, "and, besides, she isn't divorced."

"I did not mention any particular lady, and I believe that there is nothing like a legal training for making a person flippant!" I said, getting up to leave the room.

"But I have never studied ecclesiastical law. Don't go, Catherine, I want to talk to you."

"And ecclesiastical law is the only thing I want to talk about just now," I said firmly, closing the door behind me.

CHAPTER XI

A CHILDREN'S PARTY

"Trip it, little urchins all!
Lightly as the little bee,
Two by two, and three by three;
And about, about go we."

Elizabethan Song.

THE Peacocks have a little meadow at the end of their garden, and they usually have a children's party in the summer, when the hay is cut. Yesterday was the day of the party, little Cecily Peacock's fourth birthday, and we all met, mothers as well as children.

Mrs. Manners came with four of hers, Mrs. Welwyn with her two, I with my two, and one or two outsiders, leading their well-groomed offspring by the hand.

The children looked charming, all in clean frocks and suits, many of them with bare feet and sandals, for that is one of our latest ideas with regard to hygienic clothing.

Mrs. Peacock, with her three children, awaited us on the lawn, where we were to have tea before going into the hay-field, and I watched her with a sympathetic eye as the little ones dispersed and began to chase one another about the garden regardless of flower-beds and borders. It was a "reasonable childish impulse," and Mrs. Peacock controlled her feelings admirably. She only smiled (a little sadly, it is true) when Amabelle brought her a large piece of a treasured pink geranium, which Dick had inadvertently kicked off.

"It does things good to take bits off, you know. Daddy says so," Amabelle remarked consolingly.

"Let us take the children into the field," I suggested.

"No, not before tea; it isn't worth while," Mrs. Peacock answered. "Don't jump on the flower-beds, there's dear children," she implored—in vain. The children never seemed to hear her even.

I tried to catch Amabelle, but she eluded me by bounding into the middle of a bed of petunias. She and I had already had a little difference of opinion because she had brought a present for Cecily, and at the last moment had declined to part with it. It was a tiny gilt tea-set, and as she carried it from our house to the Peacocks' I knew that her heart-strings were winding themselves around it.

"I should like a little tea-set like Cecily's," she said wistfully more than once.

"Only wait till your birthday comes," I answered cheerfully.

"My birfday isn't for years and years,"

was her doleful reply.

Still, I did not suspect her of the design of keeping Cecily's present herself, and I was very much taken aback when she refused to part with it as soon as the moment of trial came.

"You have got something for Cecily, haven't you, dear?" I said when she had politely wished her "many happy, 'turns."

"No, I haven't got nothing," Amabelle answered, slipping the little parcel into her pocket and putting her hands behind her back in a defiant manner.

What could I do? I could not make a scene there before all the children and their mothers, and force the offering from her, and so I was obliged to leave her to her own conscience.

Fortunately little Cecily was quite oblivious. She had had enough birthday presents, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she was induced even to say "how d'you do" to her guests. Her whole energies were absorbed in a solitary game, which she played at a little distance from the others during the whole of the party. I watched her myself while she did the same thing over at least a dozen times. First she placed a little piece of stick carefully on the grass and made believe to cover it over and tuck it up in bed, then she climbed laboriously on to a big stone and jumped off, puffing vigorously as she did so.

"Come on! Don't take any notice of her!" Harold said to Dick, who had stopped a moment to look at her. "She has been playing that game ever since last Saturday, when we went to the circus. She never stops. She's the clown's brother Billy, you know, that put his candle to bed and blowed himself out of window. Come on!"

It was only the sight of the birthday cake and the four little coloured candles (guttering horribly in the summer breeze) that induced Cecily to leave her game and sit up to tea with the rest.

All the children were hunted off the flower-beds and gathered round a table on the lawn, and, as often happens, no sooner were they seated than an unnatural shyness came over them. They sat silent, solemnly eating their bread-and-butter and gazing at the cake and the candles in the middle of the table with expressionless faces.

"Aren't they good children!" said Mrs. Peacock, nodding her head approvingly at them.

Suddenly little Roger Welwyn, a very nervous child, burst into tears.

"I am not enjoying myself so very much!" he sobbed, overcome by shyness.

His mother tried to reason with him. Mrs. Manners gave him a bun, "Toute Moralité" a lump of sugar. It had no effect, but Mrs. Peacock's promise that he should blow out the candles after tea was over, completely restored him to cheerfulness.

"He is only five, poor little mite!" said Mrs. Manners kindly.

"Where is Dr. Peacock?" I asked.

"He is always the life of a children's party. Nobody could be shy in his presence."

"I am expecting him every moment, but he is so busy you've no idea. He was up half the night again last night. It is so awkward," Mrs. Peacock continued, dropping her voice to a loud whisper, "when babies will come in the night. I suppose it can't be helped, but it is excessively inconvenient."

Little Podge Manners, who was sitting close by, a comfortable, stolid child, looked up and said:

"He needn't bring them in the night if he doesn't want to. He brought us our baby in the morning."

Mrs. Peacock looked at Mrs. Manners and smiled.

"Oh, you see, Podge," she said quite readily, "such lots of people want babies

now that there isn't time to take them all in the day, and so he has to bring them to some people in the night."

Podge seemed satisfied.

"When I grow up," he said solemnly, "I shall have a wife and lots and lots of babies."

"He's so fond of babies," his mother explained in her motherly way.

"I hate babies! They are poison," drawled Phyllis Peacock, and the remark—evidently intended as a joke—was greeted with peals of laughter.

"Where do children get such ideas?" said Mrs. Peacock, looking as pleased as though the remark had been one of startling originality.

The laughter continued, and the ice being broken in this way, the party became quite convivial. Harold and Dick, who had got together at the end of the table, had to be forcibly separated, and I did not envy Christina Manners her place between them. Christina is a sweet-looking girl of nineteen, and, as her mother says, very good with the little ones. She certainly excelled herself on this occasion, for she kept the

peace in a masterly manner between Harold and Dick.

"Oh, here's daddy!" "Here's Dr. Peacock!" shouted the children. "And here's Mrs. Greenlaw, too!"

Dr. Peacock came bustling up, accompanied by Mrs. Greenlaw.

"What! begun tea without me! What impudence! I hope you have saved us some cake, Cecily," he cried. "My dear," he said, turning to his wife, "here is Mrs. Greenlaw. I have induced her to come because it is the grown-up people who always enjoy a children's party the most."

"It is so kind of him to ask me!" said Mrs. Greenlaw with her most gracious smile.

Mrs. Peacock welcomed her with an excellent appearance of cordiality, found her a place at her side, and gave her some tea, chatting pleasantly all the time.

"Your husband will be here in a few minutes, Mrs. Howard-Jones," said the doctor, nodding to me. "And Green and Manners are coming, too."

The children claimed his whole atten-

tion, and as soon as he devoted it to them the party became perfectly uproarious.

"There is nothing so delightful as a children's party," said Mrs. Greenlaw loudly, trying to make her voice audible to Mrs. Manners, who was sitting next to her.

"I always enjoy myself. It takes one out of one's self," said Mrs. Manners with her happy smile, raising her voice almost to a shout.

Polite conversation became an impossibility during the rest of the meal, and when it was over we all started off for the hay-field, except Cecily, who returned to her game on the lawn, and little Nancy Welwyn, who wished to learn it, and "Toute Moralité," who stayed to look after the two babies.

The rest of the children were in the highest spirits. They rushed about the field, rolling over and over in the hay, chasing one another and joining forces to bury Dr. Peacock, Howard, or Mr. Green, and to sit on their prostrate bodies until they were shaken off and buried themselves in their turn.

Mrs. Peacock and I stood watching the

scene. Her face was wreathed in smiles, until suddenly her eye happened to light upon Mrs. Welwyn, who was seated on a hay-cock at a little distance from us talking to Mrs. Greenlaw.

Her face clouded and she said impatiently, "He's away again!" jerking her head in their direction.

"Who?" I asked, though of course I knew perfectly well who she meant.

"Why, Mr. Welwyn. I think the way, he neglects her is shameful, don't you?"

"Oh, he is obliged to go to Paris and all sorts of places about his book," I said quietly.

"Nonsense! Any one can write a book at home if he likes. He has plenty of books. She hasn't any spirit or she wouldn't stand it. I wouldn't! And if I were Mr. Welwyn I shouldn't much like this violent friendship with Mrs. Greenlaw.—Harold! Harold!"

She broke off, for Harold was fighting with Dick. They were dodging round and round a hay-cock, getting in a punch or a drive at one another when they felt they could do so with safety, in quite a business-like manner.

"You get hold of Dick and I will catch Harold," cried Mrs. Peacock, starting off at a run.

I stayed where I was. I was not particularly anxious to interfere just at that point, for I know what an aggravating child Harold is, and how these little skirmishes almost always begin.

"My father's got a motor-car," he says in an aggressive tone. And Dick, whose father hasn't even a toy engine, can only retort with his fists.

Harold had a baby brother a year or so ago, and he used him in the same way to make Dick feel his inferiority. It was so galling that the poor child came home and requested me to supply him with a baby brother immediately, and if Harold's had not died, I hardly know what I should have done.

Now it is the motor-car, and I shall be thankful when next term comes and Harold goes to school.

Mrs. Peacock succeeded in capturing Harold, who was getting the worst of it, while I was hesitating, and at this moment Mrs. Manners came up to me and said:

"The children are getting a little wild. Don't you think we had better start a game?—Tiny! Ivy! Podge!"

Her three little ones were sitting rather heavily on Mr. Green's body, and Amabelle and Phyllis on his head.

We had some difficulty in collecting the whole party, but we managed it at last and suggested a game.

"What shall we play? Hunt the slipper? Oranges and lemons? French and English?" suggested Dr. Peacock.

"I want to play 'I sent a letter to my love,'" Amabelle said immediately, with such an air of decision that all the other children fell in with her idea like a flock of sheep.

"But the words are so senseless!" said Mrs. Peacock. "I don't know where they learn these silly games."

"It's a beauty game!" said Amabelle, pouting.

"I carried water in my glove,
I sent a letter to my love,
I dropped it once, I dropped it twice,
I dropped it all three times!"

chanted Podge.

"What do you do then?" asked Mrs. Greenlaw.

"You all stand in a ring, and somebody runs round with a handkerchief and flicks once, twice, three times, and then runs," cried Tiny.

"And the one what catches her takes the hankshuff and 'carries water in her

glove," said Amabelle.

"What a pretty game! I think these old words are delightful—so inconsequent and absurd. Fancy carrying water in a glove and dropping a letter to your love, not once, but three times!" said Mrs. Greenlaw, laughing.

The children were already forming the

ring.

"I never saw anything absurd about it," I said gaily. "Of course one wouldn't choose to carry water in a glove if one had a pail. But I have always had a very clear vision of the lady, walking a few paces ahead of her lover, with the letter, and dropping it once, twice, to pick it up before he could reach it, the third time dropping it in earnest and running away."

Mrs. Greenlaw darted an intelligent

glance at me. "I see now," she said smiling.

"Come, Mrs. Greenlaw! Come, Mrs. Howard-Jones and Mrs. Welwyn! You must all play. Every one is bound to play," called Dr. Peacock from the ring.

We joined in, and the game proceeded with a great deal of vigour, the grown-up people playing with at least as much spirit as the children. Mrs. Peacock's looks showed that she considered Mr. Green guilty of an indiscretion in touching Mrs. Greenlaw with the handkerchief, but her face relaxed when Mrs. Greenlaw, having caught Mr. Green, touched Harold and did not allow herself to be easily caught by him.

I have not seen Mr. Green and Mrs. Greenlaw together (except through the privet hedge) since the day when I was in the fields with the children, and it amused me to notice how self-conscious he looked when he approached Mrs. Greenlaw and I was anywhere in her neighbourhood. However, as I was careful to show no signs of intelligence, he soon ceased to suspect me of having played the part of eavesdropper,

and his manner became more natural. Mrs. Greenlaw's attitude was, as far as I could see, as perfectly easy and friendly towards him as towards any other member of the party.

We played a variety of games, and at hunt the slipper, when we were all seated on the ground, I found that Amabelle had sidled close up to me.

"Mammy," she said in a tragic whisper, "there's something hurting me dread-fully!"

"Is it the slipper you are sitting on?" I asked.

"No, it pricks."

I caught her up quickly. Visions of bees, wasps, even snakes, flew through my brain. There was nothing under her on the grass. As I lifted her, however, she rattled in a peculiar manner, and I was reminded of the tea-set. It was, of course, broken into atoms in her pocket, and the jagged edges of the fragments, especially the broken spout of the tea-pot, had no doubt caused her considerable inconvenience when she sat upon them.

"That comes of being naughty and 155

keeping other little girls' presents," I said severely.

"I'll be good and give it to Cecily now," sobbed Amabelle. "I will be good."

"Too late," I said, leaving her while I went to put the broken china in a place of safety, where the other children were not likely to be injured by it.

When I came back I found Mrs. Green-law talking to the child, and Amabelle was smiling as only a child can smile, her lashes still wet with tears. I am afraid from a word or two that she let drop later that Mrs. Greenlaw promised her another little tea-set like the broken one for her very own.

When the children had gone home, the grown - up people remained to supper. Candles were lighted on the table, but outside the daylight lingered and the scent of the hay and of the flowers in the garden came in through the open windows as we sat and talked. Mrs. Greenlaw was the life and soul of the party; Mr. Green, Mrs. Welwyn, Dr. Peacock, all hung on her every word, but she showed herself quite as gracious to Mrs. Peacock, to Howard, and to

Mr. Manners as to any one of her particular admirers.

There was talk of the village cricket club, and she delighted Mr. Green by proposing to recite at the annual entertainment which is to be held shortly for its benefit. He was not quite so delighted, however, when she proposed that Dr. Peacock should recite a dialogue or act a little piece with her.

"My dear, you have no time to give to it," Mrs. Peacock said to her husband. "You haven't a moment to learn a part. Remember you were up all last night again!—Couldn't you induce your brother to do something with you?" she asked, turning to Mrs. Greenlaw.

"I am afraid his time is too much taken up," Mrs. Greenlaw answered promptly. "And I hear that the county member is going to introduce a star. Isn't one star enough? Oughtn't the rest of the entertainment to be the result of local effort? It should be an opportunity for the display of local talent, don't you think?"

Of course we all agreed with her, for the party then assembled comprised all the local talent worth considering in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Peacock's objection to her husband's taking part was quickly disposed of, and before she could bring forward any other he had deftly turned the conversation, and was explaining to us his views on education and deploring the lack of really modern schools.

"The great thing we have to do nowadays," he said, "is to cultivate individuality. A child's reasonable impulses should not be checked, or his natural feelings suppressed. What we want is men and women with ideas of their own, and our present system of education is calculated to produce machines. I will not have my children made into machines! I will not send my boy to a public school and through the regular mill. I am going to send him to a man who, I believe, will follow out my ideas."

Mrs. Greenlaw looked very much interested, but she said nothing.

"I hope you will find it answer," remarked Mr. Manners very seriously. "But for my part, I believe in the mill. It

brings out a boy's best qualities—makes a man of him. What it gets rid of is the chaff, nothing but the chaff." (His two eldest boys are at present undergoing the process.)

"I quite agree with you," remarked Mr. Green, who has been thoroughly well ground. "I believe in a form of education that has stood the test of time."

Mrs. Manners turned to me. "Boys must follow the regular course; there is no help for it. With girls it is different," she said, looking with motherly pride at Christina, whose education has been ruthlessly, sacrificed to that of the boys.

"What do you think of mixed education?" asked Mrs. Greenlaw pleasantly of Dr. Peacock. "I believe it works well in America."

"I don't think it will ever work on this side of the water, even if it is seriously attempted," Dr. Peacock answered. "It is a fad—simply a fad!"

"If we cannot have mixed education," I began, "I should like to turn the tables and send all the boys to the girls' schools and all the girls to the boys'—teach the

girls the manly virtues and the boys the womanly."

There was, of course, a general laugh at such an outrageous idea, and every one began talking at once, airing his or her views on the subject. Mrs. Greenlaw, who was sitting just opposite to me, leaned towards me and said:

"I am quite sure that you and I are agreed on the matter of the education of girls. We would teach them independence and cultivate their individuality on Dr. Peacock's system and utterly discourage clinging."

"What's that? What's that?" said Dr. Peacock, who had heard his name but had not caught what Mrs. Greenlaw had said.

"Why, it's Harold!" exclaimed Mrs. Peacock suddenly, starting up from her chair.

We all turned our eyes to the window, and outside on the dewy lawn, flitting about in his nightshirt, we saw Harold, a butter-fly-net in his hand, his eyes scanning the heavens.

"Oh, do go and bring him in! He'll catch his death," said Mrs. Peacock in anx-

ious tones to her husband. "Go out and tell him to come in at once."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear. He won't hurt; it is quite a warm night. Now, what can be his idea in taking a butterfly-net out with him at this hour? Does he think he'll catch a falling star?" Dr. Peacock was thoroughly interested in his son's movements, and did not wish his wife to interfere with them.

"He is trying to catch a bat, don't you see?" said his mother. "He has always been wanting to get out at night, and no doubt now he thought we were too much occupied to see him." She hurried out into the garden, unable to contain herself any longer.

Dr. Peacock laughed heartily. We all laughed, and finally, as his mother did not return, the whole party went out on to the lawn, and even into the hay-field, to assist

Harold in his bat-hunt.

CHAPTER XII

A VILLAGE ENTERTAINMENT

"The rural rout,
All round about,
Like bees came swarming thick to hear him sing."

Davidson's Poetical Rhapsody.

WE have an entertainment every summer for the benefit of our village cricket club, and although I know that jealousy and ill-feeling are usual enough in other places among the performers on such occasions, at Edenrise we have always managed the affair with very little friction. Of course every one knows just what to expect: Mr. Manners recites, Christina plays the violin, the choir-boys sing glees or catches, and Mr. Green a solo, generally The Lost Chord or To Anthea, phich the applause applaud vociferously in the hope that The Cat Came Back or the Four-horse Char-à-bancs will follow as an encore. If the rector takes the chair the curate suppresses the comic ele-

ment and introduces an old English song in the place of our favourite Four-horse Char-à-bancs, but he does not really think it beneath his dignity to amuse his parishioners. Until lately he was proud of playing his own accompaniments, and it is only since Mrs. Greenlaw has been here that he has realized how much more effective a song may be when the singer stands and faces his audience, provided, of course, that he has faith in his accompanist. His sister, I suppose, came to the conclusion that he had too much faith in Mrs. Greenlaw, and she made up her mind that she would play for him at the public entertainment herself. At the rehearsal, however, she played so badly, thumping so many unexpected notes in the bass, that we were obliged to protest, and Mrs. Greenlaw was invited to take her place. The songs, with her spirited accompaniment, went off with more than their usual éclat, but Miss Green retired with rather a bad grace, and this has given rise to some little friction and a trifling coolness between them. It is not the matter of the accompaniment alone; there was already another reason for jealousy, for Miss

Green wrote a little piece for Mrs. Green-law and Dr. Peacock to act at the entertainment, and they rejected it on the ground that it was above the heads of the audience—too good, in fact. And the piece which they have substituted is, it is rumoured, adapted by Mrs. Greenlaw herself.

The night of the entertainment came, and if the affair did not go off as well as usual, I am sure it was because we erred in trying to introduce too many novelties into the programme and the audience did not know what to expect. The county member took the chair, and his portly womenkind, in resplendent evening dress, filled more than half the front row of seats at 2s. 6d. The rest of the schoolroom was packed with all our friends and neighbours, and all the farmers and villagers for miles aroundevery one who did, or did not, take an interest in the cricket club. Fathers and mothers with their whole families, down to the babe at the breast, were present. Youths and maidens conveniently squeezed together, two on a chair, were prepared to enjoy themselves to the utmost. If they did not prove such a sympathetic audience as usual,

I am convinced that it was not their fault, but the fault of the performers and of their choice of subjects.

Mr. Manners, for instance, instead of reciting Calverley's Water-Rat and the parody of Hiawatha, which have always gone off so well, must needs select Browning's How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix for this occasion, and I am bound to admit that he recited it with a great deal of spirit and intensity. It is a poem that I can never read without weeping, and I was choking back my tears at the point where the good horse Roland gallops into Aix, his rider laughing, shouting, making any noise, to encourage him, when Mr. Manners, who had raised his voice little by little, gave vent at last to a high-pitched hysterical laugh, and paused with a queer kind of sob in his throat. The rural part of the audience, hearing the laugh, and thinking something was expected of them, joined in in a tentative, mystified sort of way that wholly upset my gravity, and I was thankful to be able to laugh naturally at the next piece, which was encored three times. It was a catch by the choir-boys,

the words of which related to the inconveniences arising from sitting down too heavily on a tin tack.

The audience was warming up and our spirits rose in anticipation of the next item, the great event of the evening—a recitation by a London celebrity, whom the county member introduced with a few chaste words of praise.

The celebrity arranged his cuffs and gazed steadily at his nails while we clapped furiously. Then, when silence had reigned for a full minute, he suddenly threw back his head, took one step forward, gazed fiercely round, and began, in a voice of concentrated passion, to recite a piece of an extremely gruesome nature, which I have never heard before, and have little wish to hear again.

The dramatis personæ consist of:

- 1. The corpse of a beautiful woman;
- 2. A Raphael-faced priest, who has administered extreme unction;
 - 3. The husband of the dead woman;
 - 4. His dearest friend.

It was, I assure you, a blood-curdling moment for us when the husband goes up

in the darkness and, feeling about for his miniature on his dead wife's breast, encounters the warm hand of his dearest friend, who is also seeking for a portrait—his own!

Just then, whether by design or accident I do not know, the most brilliant of our schoolroom lamps began to flicker, burned low, and emitted a most horrible smell. Little Phyllis Peacock, who ought to have been in bed, burst into a dismal wail, in which several children at the back of the room joined. All this certainly added to the effect, and the feelings of the audience were so wrought up at the end of the piece that nobody knew whether to laugh or to cry when it was discovered that the portrait which the dead woman actually wore on her breast was not the portrait of her husband, or of his friend, but of the Raphael-faced priest!!

Everybody seemed to feel a little uncomfortable, and although we applauded as loudly as we could, the London celebrity was not encored, and we waited with a sigh of relief for the next piece on the programme. I say we, but personally, instead

of giving vent to a sigh of relief, I felt a cold shudder run down my back, for Dick was expected to appear to recite a little dialogue in French with Harold Peacock. I had all along had my doubts of Dick, and I began now to wish earnestly that I had been firm in refusing to allow him to appear in public.

When the pause grew ominously long and the audience showed signs of impatience I whispered to Howard to go and see what had happened. He went and found Dick barricaded in a corner behind the scenes, steadily refusing to move, while "Toute Moralité" desperately ejaculated: "Courage, courage, mon enfant! En avant! En avant!

Howard joined in her threats and entreaties, Dr. Peacock and Mrs. Greenlaw descended to bribes, but all to no purpose. Dick was firm, and Mr. Green was obliged to sing a song or two to fill the gap. I have often heard that stage fright is quite an uncontrollable passion, and I shall not allow Dick to be punished, though I know how trying it was for "Toute Moralité" and Mrs. Peacock, who had been completely

deceived by his swaggering air and apparent eagerness to perform. I shall be quite afraid to face them until the affair has blown over a little, for Harold would have done well enough, I daresay, if it had not been for Dick.

I felt dreadfully cast down, but the last piece on the programme was of a refreshingly light nature, and was extremely well acted by Mrs. Greenlaw and Doctor Peacock, so that I was carried out of myself. But that again was new and a little too subtle for the rural audience, who could not understand how Dr. Peacock could bring himself to be rude to a lady and quarrel about an appointment in a photographer's studio. I heard a running comment from the back of the room and remarks such as:

"Doctor 'ud never be'ave like that."

"Oh, come now, doctor, let the lady go first!"

And when the lady made a witty retort to a sally on the part of the gentleman:

"Well, she do seem a spitfire and quite able to hold her own, do Mrs. Greenlaw!"

No one could fail to understand the dénouement, however, and we applauded

wildly when the lady and gentleman, who had accidentally come to be photographed at the same time, and had each refused to give way to the other, emerged from their respective dressing-rooms simultaneously, in fancy dress—he as Romeo, she as Juliet!

The delighted photographer improvised a balcony and the two made a charming group, Mrs. Greenlaw looking really lovely in a white and gold gown of classic simplicity, while Dr. Peacock, in a wig and a flowing velvet cloak, knelt on one knee to kiss her hand.

Mr. Green managed the lime-light and Mr. Manners the curtain, which unfortunately fell with a crash, pole and all, enveloping him in its folds! Mrs. Peacock, who had been shuffling uneasily in her seat behind me, brightened when she saw Romeo and Juliet separate and endeavour to extricate Mr. Manners, who was struggling among the foot-lights.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Peacock, when the smell of burning was becoming bearable, "it is perfectly plain that Mrs. Greenlaw has been on the stage. There is no question of it, and that accounts for everything. Our

chemist told me only yesterday that he was sure he had seen her in a London theatre. Unfortunately, he had forgotten the name under which she appeared, and the name of the play in which he saw her act, but he thinks he will remember in a day or two."

"I have no doubt he will if he tries," I said. "But isn't she perfectly lovely?"

Mrs. Welwyn, who sat just in front, heard the remark, and turned a delighted face to me.

"Oh, it is the lime-light, you know, and of course she makes up well," Mrs. Peacock remarked in an offhand manner. "I wonder she did not get her brother to act with her."

"Dr. Peacock looked splendid, and I am sure no one could have done better. I did not know he was such an accomplished actor," I said.

Mrs. Peacock beamed upon me—she entirely forgot Dick for the moment—and I heard her shortly after congratulating Mrs. Greenlaw quite enthusiastically. Outside the door when we were leaving, I overheard Miss Green telling a friend of hers that she had been against a curtain and lime-light

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from the first, and she considered drawingroom frivolities, such as the last piece, extremely unsuitable for a village entertainment, the aim of which was not to amuse the jaded members of fashionable society, but to elevate, as well as to entertain, the people.

"At any rate," Howard said when we were discussing the events of the evening in our own room, "Mrs. Greenlaw does not pretend to elevate any one, and that is something to her credit in these days of earnest endeavour!"

He kept chuckling at intervals long after he was in bed, and once he woke me up to confide to me an epitaph he had composed for Miss Green, which ran:

"She sank into an early grave exhausted by her too earnest endeavours to elevate her contemporaries."

"It will of course be in Latin, or Greek, or perhaps in Hebrew," he added sleepily.

CHAPTER XIII

AUNT JANE

"She was an excellent person in every way—and won the respect even of Mrs. Grundy;

She was a good housewife, too, and wouldn't have wasted a penny if she had owned the Koh-i-noor."

Bab Ballads.

Aunt Jane came to see me this afternoon, and we got on together capitally, since domestic economy was hardly touched upon. We talked at first of the village entertainment, which she had been unable to attend. I gave her as graphic an account of it as I was able, not omitting Dick's part in the proceedings, for Aunt Jane is quite equal to seeing the humorous side of such an affair, and of judging a child's naughtiness leniently.

The cricket club led us on to talk of the curate, and then of his bees, and of a report that has reached us that he has lost more than one swarm this summer while he has

been playing croquet with Mrs. Greenlaw. "All simply he let them go!" said Toute Moralité.

"Tant mieux!" said Aunt Jane, who has a great weakness for French phrases, and loves to let them off on me.

She will say with a twinkle in her eye:

"I have a new French phrase, my dear. I don't know how you would pronounce it, but I know how I shall!"

Her translation is often as original as her pronunciation, and I have heard her use "demi-jour" and "demi-monde" to signify "half the day" and "half the world," while "affaires de cœur" she takes to mean "affairs at court."

"Tant mee-u," said Aunt Jane. "So much the worse!"

"You mean 'tant pis,' I think," I said quite gravely.

"Certainly, that is what I mean, and I think that if a person undertakes to keep bees he should keep them, and not let them escape and swarm about the country while he is playing croquet."

"I daresay if he lost them, somebody else benefited," I said, "though I cannot

help hoping myself that those poor bees got clear away and are living their own lives free from human interference."

Aunt Jane laughed, and then quite suddenly, after a brief silence, she fixed her penetrating eyes upon me and said:

"What do you do with your candle-

ends, my dear?"

"Burn them, I think," I stammered, for somehow I am never ready with suitable answers to such questions.

"You think? That means, I suppose, that they are burned in the kitchen fire! Never allow the least thing to be wasted in a house, my dear; there is a use for everything—bacon fat, for example, what do you do with it? Do you have every bit run down and clarified?"

"Oh, yes, Aunt Jane, I told Martha to do it after you spoke of it the last time."

"See that it is done yourself, and, whatever you do, don't leave everything to servants, and drive the rag and bone man from the door! A policy of lazy-fair will not do in housekeeping, remember," she said firmly, but quite good-naturedly, emphasizing the French phrase with a nod. She has seen too much of the world to expect young people to follow her advice. She gives it from a sense of duty, in a crisp, decided manner, and regards them with a humorous leniency when they fail to profit by it.

I was glad to turn the conversation away from household matters, and fortunately just then Mrs. Greenlaw's graceful form was discernible for a moment among the trees in her garden.

"I do not approve of her!" Aunt Jane said with a little jerk of her head. "Or of her conduct. Marriage is not given for our pleasure, but to chasten us. She may be the injured party, I don't say that she isn't, but when you take a husband you take him 'for better, for worse,' and the worse he is the more it is your duty to cleave to him. I despise, and I always have despised, a person who leaves a sinking ship."

"The woman is the weaker vessel, Aunt Jane, and we really have no reason to suppose Mrs. Greenlaw's husband was a sinking ship when she left him—or he left her," I remarked guardedly.

"That is my idea of him, however," she said with her usual decision. "Of course,

I am quite civil to Mrs. Greenlaw when I meet her, but I do not in the least approve of her conduct. *I* cling to the marriage laws and to the prayer-book, and John shall vote for the member that supports them."

She closed her mouth firmly, and the grapes and butterflies on her bonnet quivered as she jerked her head. It is quite impossible to argue with Aunt Jane on some subjects, and I did not attempt it now, and, as it happened, Miss Green came in at that moment.

Tea was brought, and as I poured it out I amused myself with the contrast between the two women, the old-fashioned housewife and the new. Miss Green is under thirty, spare, modern, colourless, correct in a coat and skirt which have a faint suggestion of a clerical cut about them, and the severest head-gear—her whole costume contrasting strikingly with Aunt Jane's beaded mantle and many-hued bonnet.

If Uncle John had only possessed his wife's originality and decision of character he would have been a successful man. If Mr. Green had his sister's love of learning and extraordinary memory, he would make

a name as a preacher, and doubtless end an archbishop. Either of these men would have made really admirable women. So Providence loves to sport with us!

We talked idly while my mind wandered in this way, and I soon began to notice that Miss Green's eyes were constantly turned in the direction of the croquet-lawn next door, and her next words showed whither her thoughts were tending.

"Do you play croquet with your neighbour often?" she asked me.

"I? Oh, no; very seldom. I am so very busy looking after my domestic affairs. It takes me all my time to save my candle-ends, and even then I only half do it," I said, looking at Aunt Jane and laughing.

"If you poke fun at me I shall tell Howard," said Aunt Jane. "You will make Miss Green think that I am an old stick-in-the-mud, but I assure you, Miss Green, I am really nothing of the sort. It was more than a year ago that I said to my husband: 'John, we must keep pace with the times! I refuse to be left behind. I don't know what you propose to do, but I

intend to take in the Strand Magazine and the Review of Reviews. One must know a little of what is going on in the world!'"

"Does Uncle John read them?" I asked.

"Well, no, my dear; he says he prefers the Vicar of Wakefield and Gulliver's Travels, and if I ask him what he thinks of the Conduct of the War, or the Condition of China, he only says, 'Lamentable, quite lamentable, my dear,' and there's an end of it. John never will argue."

I could not help smiling, and Miss

Green said approvingly:

"Swift and Goldsmith are excellent reading, but one should study the moderns as well—Browning, Ibsen and the rest."

"Oh, I know you, with your Ibsens and your Matterlinks and your White Waltmans!" said Aunt Jane, shaking her head at Miss Green. "English Literature for English readers I say, though there is no harm in knowing what is going on in other countries. It broadens one's outlook and confirms one in one's own opinions—'insular prejudices' perhaps you would call them."

Aunt Jane's eyes twinkled as Miss

Green cleared her throat and began her endeavour to convince the elder woman of the narrowness of her views, but just then we heard the tapping of croquet-balls and saw that Mrs. Greenlaw was beginning a game with the curate, and Miss Green, suddenly dropping her argumentative tone, said apologetically:

"My brother is so fond of croquet."

"A very healthy exercise, and not too violent," said Aunt Jane with ready tact. "People are so apt to overdo it with exercise. I always say that cricket, football and tennis, as they are played now, are only fit for acrobats!" Aunt Jane gave that little decided movement of the head with which she concludes and dismisses an argument.

"But exercise is so good for one," said Miss Green. "I never feel well unless I take a great deal."

"Depend upon it, you would feel a great deal better if you took less," remarked Aunt Jane, with decision. "No young people are well nowadays, and the reason is that they do nothing but take exercise. They bicycle, dance, play tennis and hockey from morning to night; they ruin their complexions, and leave no time to cultivate the domestic virtues. Look at my niece there! She laughs at me and pokes fun at the domestic virtues!"

Aunt Jane smiled indulgently at me as she spoke, and Miss Green looked a trifle annoyed as she said dryly:

"A little common sense and a cookery book is all that a woman requires to manage a house, and I, for one, can work my brain a thousand times better if I take plenty of exercise."

"Your brain works no better because your body is jaded, and brains are very necessary to manage a house properly. Don't forget that," said Aunt Jane, looking disapprovingly at Miss Green's thin figure and sallow complexion.

"It is no use trying to convince you of the importance of exercise. I must really go in and see Mrs. Greenlaw now. I have owed her a call for ages," Miss Green said, rising. "She was not at home when I came in here."

I had my reasons for doubting Mrs. Greenlaw's absence from home at that time,

but I clearly understood Miss Green's reasons for spending so much time on my side of the hedge.

"A very modern, sensible young woman," said Aunt Jane, nodding in the direction of Miss Green's retreating figure. "Rather determined in her own opinions, but I see she looks after her brother well."

"She thinks him too friendly with Mrs.

Greenlaw," I said.

We watched her join the croquet-players, and we observed that Mrs. Greenlaw greeted her effusively and her brother somewhat coldly. She played with two balls against them, and we heard her voice raised in protest when Mr. Green insisted that Mrs. Greenlaw's ball was through the second hoop, when evidently a large portion remained on the other side.

Aunt Jane regarded them in silence, grimly nodding her head.

- "What is she doing here?" she said abruptly at last.
 - "Who? Miss Green?"
 - "No, the golden-haired lady."
- "Oh, I don't know; it is no use asking me. She lives here for the same reason

that we all live here, I suppose. Edenrise is healthy, gravel soil, convenient distance from town, fairly cheap, and with extraordinary social opportunities, while for her it has the additional advantage of the absence of her husband."

"She won't be here long," said Aunt Jane, waiving my reasons.

"We shall never be able to do without her now," I said, "and I'm sure she will not have the heart to tear herself away in the winter when we begin our singing practices and literary gatherings."

"A woman like that will not amuse herself long with a parcel of women. Mark my words!" Aunt Jane remarked curtly.

"We are not all women," I said indignantly. "There are plenty of men here. There are our husbands; she has a brother, who comes to see her from time to time; and then there is the curate."

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane, tapping her foot impatiently on the gravel, while her eyes rested on the kneeling figure of the young man, who was arranging his sister's ball a little too artfully for Mrs. Greenlaw to croquet, while Miss Green (who is not always good-tempered at croquet and Shakespeare-readings and such games of skill) stood by scowling and chipping little bits out of the lawn with her mallet.

I have observed for some time a tendency on Miss Green's part to insist that her brother is not really on intimate terms with Mrs. Greenlaw. I have also observed what a peculiarly irritating effect croquet seems to have on the temper! Mrs. Peacock never looks happy when she is playing with her husband and Mrs. Greenlaw, and only yesterday, when Mr. and Mrs. Welwyn were there, I noticed that Mr. Welwyn stood aloof, hacking holes in the gravel path, while his wife and Mrs. Greenlaw knelt and plotted against him on the grass.

I have, in fact, come to the conclusion that croquet is a game for two—though occasionally perhaps four very exceptional persons may play together happily enough, for the Manners family seem able to enjoy themselves when they play with Mrs. Greenlaw. I heard their cheerful voices the other evening and the laughter of Christina, and, looking through the privet

hedge, I saw that Mr. Manners had hung his muffler on a rose-bush and would not be persuaded that the grass was damp, while Mrs. Greenlaw and Christina abetted him in his reckless disregard of the rules of hygiene as laid down by his wife. Mrs. Manners regarded all three with her indulgent smile, and, watching her opportunity, took the muffler from the rose-tree and tied it firmly round the neck of her unresisting husband. But the Manners family are exceptional people. I do not believe that even chess or golf—games which never fail to rouse my worst passions—would upset their serenity for a single moment.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. GREENLAW AND THE FANCY FÊTE

"She works by charms, by spells, by the figure, and such daubery as this is beyond our element."—Merry Wives of Windsor.

THE last two days have been days of great excitement in Edenrise, for we have been holding a fancy Fête in the County-member's grounds.

It was not very long after Mrs. Greenlaw settled here that we came to the conclusion that we must do something to raise money for church purposes, and a few of us met informally at Mrs. Peacock's to discuss the question.

Miss Green made a little sort of speech, from which we gathered that though she personally disapproved of bazaars, yet she was strongly in favour of advancing her brother in his profession, and money being necessary to endow the church and make him a vicar, money must be made by any legitimate means.

"Must it be a bazaar?" asked Mrs. Manners, coming at once to the point. "I do not like bazaars myself, though of course I know that money can be got by them that one cannot get in other ways."

"True," remarked Miss Green. "And why sane people will buy a thing they do not want, giving twice its market value for it at a bazaar, when they decline to subscribe the same money direct to the cause, remains a mystery to me."

"It is one of the little weaknesses of human nature," said Mrs. Greenlaw, "and in a case like this one is justified in taking advantage of such failings!"

"I think," said Mrs. Peacock decidedly, "that bazaars have had their day. Besides, we are busy people with little time or money to spend in accumulating elegant trifles."

"To purchase them ourselves at exorbitant prices or see them sacrificed in penny dips," I said.

"When I go to a bazaar I make a point of buying something really useful," said 13 187 Mrs. Manners. "One can generally get black-lead or dusters or something of that kind, and if one does pay more for them, one has a little something to show for one's money."

"I get eatables if I can, especially if I know where they come from," said Mrs.

Welwyn.

"I got some wonderful pinafores at the Northgreen Temperance bazaar," said Mrs. Manners; "they were quite cheap, and Ivy is wearing them still, but that was a most unusual piece of luck."

"What do you think of an old English Fête instead of a bazaar?" suggested Mrs. Greenlaw modestly. "It could be held in the open air, with a May-pole and appropriate costumes."

"What a splendid idea!" said Mrs. Peacock enthusiastically; "I wonder I never thought of it! The County-member's grounds will be the very thing. There is a bowling-green and formal gardens and peacocks. Nothing could be better!"

"I have an idea, too," said Mrs. Greenlaw, still more modestly, "that a Labyrinth, with a witch in a bower at the end, would prove a great attraction."

Mrs. Peacock was delighted, and, as it happened, the County-member had what he called a Labyrinth—a sort of dell overgrown with trees and ferns and interlaced with intricate paths.

"Will he lend his grounds?" asked Mrs. Greenlaw. "It seems almost too good to be true."

"Of course he will," answered Mrs. Peacock decidedly; "it will be such an opportunity for him to show his new place off. He will be delighted."

"Will the rector approve, do you think?" asked Miss Green.

"It will be just like him if he doesn't!" said Mrs. Peacock. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Greenlaw. I forgot he was a relative of yours."

"Don't mention it," said Mrs. Greenlaw, smiling most graciously.

"Do you propose to charge for admission to the Fête or whatever it is?" asked Miss Green.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Peacock; "two and sixpence and tea thrown in—a 189

really nice tea, long tables spread under the trees."

"With cakes and ale, not tea, if it is to be an old English Fête," said Mrs. Greenlaw.

"Capital!" said Mrs. Welwyn. "Tea wouldn't be a bit appropriate."

"It would be an anachronism. But people will want tea all the same," said Miss Green coldly.

"The witch might dispense it from her bower in the labyrinth," I suggested.

"We can call it a 'philtre,'" said Mrs. Welwyn.

"But who will act the part of the witch? I am sure I couldn't," said Mrs. Peacock.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Manners.

"Nor I," said Miss Green.

"Mrs. Greenlaw will do it to perfection," I said.

"I am sure she will," said Mrs. Welwyn, looking delighted; "she understands palmistry and everything."

"After all, I am afraid it is rather a frivolous way of getting money. A bazaar seems to me a comparatively serious affair. No fancy dress would be necessary, and I think an old book stall would be something quite new," Miss Green remarked.

"Fancy dress is simply indispensable at a bazaar now, and as for a book stall, it was tried the other day—didn't draw a bit!" said Mrs. Peacock. "No, we must have a Fête. It will require hardly any preparation, and every one will come from miles and miles around—say we get five hundred people at half-a-crown a head."

"Children half-price," put in Mrs.

Manners.

"That is only a little over sixty pounds, and then there are expenses," said Miss Green.

We felt a good deal cast down, and there was a silence while we made mental calculations, for we were all perfectly certain that five hundred two and sixpences must make more than sixty pounds. At last Mrs. Peacock—tired of mental arithmetic—said cheerfully:

"There will be no expenses, for we shall get people to give all that is necessary. And we shall charge extra for the labyrinth and the fortune-teller. Mrs. Howard-

Jones must be the fortune-teller."

"No, indeed," I said with decision.
"Mrs. Greenlaw is the only person who could do it."

Mrs. Peacock puckered her brow and maintained a solemn silence for a moment, and I was not surprised when she said suddenly, as though the idea had just struck her as a brilliant one:

"We have not seriously considered a Jumble Sale. I have got lots of things I want to get rid of."

"And so have I," said Mrs. Manners; "but at a Jumble Sale one cannot sell any article for more than threepence, and five hundred, or even a thousand, three pences are less than five hundred half-crowns."

"Gymkhanas and bicycle races are very popular just now," said Mrs. Greenlaw.

"Don't you think an Elizabethan play really well acted in the open air, would be much more entertaining and instructive?" suggested Miss Green.

"Yes; but there are practical difficulties," said Mrs. Greenlaw. "The expenses of the stage and the dresses would be considerable, and even good actors cannot make their voices carry in the open air. We should have people demanding their money back because they had not been able to hear a word."

"Well, time is flying," I remarked, "and I think we ought to settle something. I vote for the old English Fête."

"So do I," said Mrs. Welwyn heartily.

"And I," said Mrs. Manners.

"If we carry it out in a proper spirit it may be made really interesting historically," said Miss Green, coming round to the side of the majority; "quite a peep into the rural life of the England of two hundred years ago."

"There must be Old English songs sung at intervals. Christina will have to sing and play the violin. She can have a shortwaisted frock—white, with blue ribbons," said Mrs. Peacock, turning to Mrs. Manners.

"I would rather Christina did not take a prominent part," said Mrs. Manners doubtfully.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Peacock; "she is just of an age to enjoy herself, and she

will look charming. I shall let my children go, and they shall sell nuts and sweets."

"Did you notice that I was not very anxious for Christina to take any part in the proceedings?" Mrs. Manners said to me as we walked home together.

"Yes, but you are too modest," I said. "She plays the violin remarkably well."

- "It is not exactly modesty," said Mrs. Manners, hesitating. "In fact—the truth is—that I am afraid she is getting too fond of Mr. Green. She is quite put out if she misses a singing practice, and she has been going to early communion much more often lately than she used to do."
- "Have you talked to Christina about it?" I asked.
- "What an idea! It is the last thing I should think of doing. It might put ideas into her head."
- "Don't you think that Christina already has ideas in her head?"
- "That may be," said Mrs. Manners evasively, "but you do think it wise not to throw her too much into Mr. Green's society, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly, especially as Mr. Green seems rather taken up with our friend Mrs. Greenlaw just now."

"I cannot wonder at that," said Mrs.

Manners in her generous way.

The weather has been perfect and the Fête a brilliant success. The County-member threw open his grounds and his womenkind flung themselves heart and soul into the business, supplying cakes and ale ad libitum, as well as arranging a stage and acting appropriate scenes at intervals during the day.

We had a May-pole on the Bowlinggreen, dancing, racing, and processions of revellers. And a very attractive scene the Fête presented, if not so historically correct as Miss Green would have wished.

"At any rate," Mrs. Peacock remarked proudly to me as we stood a little aloof to get the general effect, "I am sure there is nothing *Victorian* about it!"

"What about croquet—and the curate?" I said, laughing, for Mr. Green was engaged in his favourite pastime, attired in his ordinary clerical costume, and his

partner, the County-member's daughter, in that of a particularly overdressed shepherdess.

"Croquet doesn't look much more modern than bowls, if it comes to that," said Mrs. Peacock, and she turned her admiring eyes to Harold, who sat piping on a penny whistle under a tree. He was dressed in blue, with a very short waist and countless buttons on his garments, and he piped hideously to a charming little circle of Bopeeps and little Red Riding-Hoods, Jack Horners, and Fairy-godmothers.

The sucess of the day was, however, the Labyrinth, and everything else fell flat in comparison. People kept going in, and coming out only to watch their opportunity of going in again, cheerfully paying their shillings each time. The curate, I observed, went in oftener than any one else, but he undoubtedly had the cause more at heart than the rest of us. We allowed each person five minutes before we permitted the next to enter the Labyrinth to consult the witch. I stood taking the money at the entrance and Howard remained at my side in the blazing sun, declining to penetrate into

the shade of the laurels or follow the alluring little path which was quickly lost to sight among trees and ferns.

Mrs. Peacock hovered suspiciously round us, refusing to go in herself to try her fate, but intercepting every one who came out and questioning them minutely. Her husband's answers to her questions were evasive and did not satisfy her.

"Go in yourself, my dear. It is well worth your while," he said.

And on being further pressed as to what had happened in the Labyrinth, he said that it was all a hoax—there was no witch there at all; and if it had not been for the good of the cause he should have regretted the shilling he had expended.

"Aren't you going in?" he asked, turning to Howard with something nearly ap-

proaching a wink.

"No; I am afraid of what I might hear," Howard said, looking at me and smiling.

"It might be something to your advantage—who knows?" said the doctor in his

jovial manner.

Mrs. Peacock pounced upon Christina
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Manners, who came out at that moment with a radiant smile on her face, and elicited from her the information that the witch was "perfectly wonderful." She was dressed in white and the bower was almost dark except for a faint light from a lamp on which a caldron was boiling, and the witch had displayed a most extraordinary insight into things past, present, and to come. Mrs. Peacock looked grave, but when Harold and another child had come out, joyfully displaying boxes of sweets which the witch had given them, she was heard to admit that Mrs. Greenlaw was, after all, a woman of tact, and might perhaps possess some little insight into character. When, however, Mr. Green had entered for the third time, and the Countymember—who looked slightly flustered had told her that the witch was dressed in black, her golden hair loose about her shoulders, a blue light imparting a weird pallor to her face, Mrs. Peacock began to show unmistakable signs of nervousness.

"I never approved of this Labyrinth business," she said to me. "I wish to good-

ness we had never countenanced the thing! It makes me creep."

"There can't be any harm in it; and we are simply coining money!" I said reassuringly. "Go in and see for yourself."

"You go; I will take the money for

you."

"Very well, I'll go with pleasure," I said, giving her my shilling and starting off willingly enough.

Beneath the grateful shade of the trees

I encountered "Toute Moralité."

"Est-ce que vous vous plaisiez là dedans?" I asked.

"Mais, non, cela ne m'amusait pas du tout," she said shortly, shrugging her shoulders.

I proceeded calmly on my way along the little winding path which curled round and round among the trees. There was a smell of dampness, a ferny, green smell, which proved very grateful to my senses after the heat and glare outside. I sat down on a mossy stone and thought of lingering there for five minutes and then returning without trying to find the witch's bower. Fanciful ideas of what I might tell

Mrs. Peacock ran through my brain! I dismissed them as unworthy, and a moment after I found myself at the entrance to the bower. It is a rustic arbour made of oak logs, and placed as it is in a thick shrubbery, there is very little light inside even on the brightest day. Mrs. Greenlaw had taken advantage of this. She was sitting on a stone in the middle of the bower, bending over a caldron. A hood covered her head and her face was half hidden, while a blue light from the lamp cast a ghastly brilliance around her. She looked up and smiled when she saw me, throwing back her hood and displaying her beautiful hair.

"Since you have come, I can take a little holiday, and we will have a cup of tea," she said cheerfully. "To tell you the truth, I am getting a little tired of acting the witch."

She placed a stool for me to sit upon, and while we drank our tea I could not resist expressing my admiration at her extraordinary talent for play-acting.

"I must say I have been enjoying myself," she said. "I feel quite in my element." "I think you have the best of it, it is so cool and pleasant here. The sun and the brilliant colours outside hurt one's eyes."

"The fun of it is that this sort of thing gives one an opportunity of saying things that are not permissible under ordinary circumstances," she remarked, smiling archly. "Shall I tell you your fortune, or shall I sketch your character from the lines on your hands?"

She held out her hand. I withdrew

mine quickly.

"I am much more interested in the characters and fortunes of other people," I said.
"Now, what did you tell 'Toute Moralité?'"

Mrs. Greenlaw laughed.

"Oh, nothing at all! Just one or two things about the chemist, mentioning no names, of course! Then I happened to read on her hand that Zola was her favourite author, and that seemed to annoy her. I did not think she would even have heard of Zola."

I smiled, and she went on.

"'Toute Moralité' is a sensible woman.
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She adopts Mrs. Peacock's views on every possible subject. As Mrs. Peacock thinks I am a dangerous woman, she thinks so, too, and is ready to suspect me of almost any crime!" She laughed.

"Mrs. Peacock is a little unreasonable on some subjects," I remarked.

"It is really very foolish of her, for she must know that Dr. Peacock is bound to flirt with some one. She might reflect that on the whole he could not have a safer person to flirt with than me!"

She watched me as she spoke to see how I took the remark. I made no sign.

"He is the only person I have really had to seriously snub to-day," she added.

"I thought he was not impressed with your supernatural powers," I said thoughtfully. "Mr. Green seems to have much more faith in them, and he has consulted you often enough to form an opinion."

"Yet I have told him some real home truths—kindly, of course," she said.

"You must have done it very kindly. I thought, too, that Christina Manners looked particularly happy when she came away," I remarked.

"One can read a child like that as easily as a book, and it costs nothing to make one-self agreeable in such a case. It takes so

little to make a child happy!"

"True," I said, and I was going on to ask if she had given or intended to give the Welwyns the benefit of her advice, when Mrs. Greenlaw stopped me, and I became aware of the fact that Mrs. Welwyn was somewhere in the background, in attendance upon the witch.

"The innocence of some people and the stupidity of others irritates me!" Mrs.

Greenlaw remarked in a low voice.

"My time is more than up and I shall be keeping others from consulting you," I said, rising. "Mrs. Peacock is only waiting until I come out."

"I wish you would let me look at your

hand," she said as I turned to go.

I shook my head and left her.

"Well, what did you see? What did she tell you?" Mrs. Peacock began eagerly the

moment she caught sight of me.

"It is delightfully cool in the Labyrinth," I replied; "and I got such a good cup of tea! Won't you go now?"

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She lingered a few minutes and asked me several penetrating questions, but as the answers did not satisfy her, she put down her shilling in a determined manner and departed to investigate the Labyrinth herself.

In less than ten minutes I saw her coming out again in the company of Mr. Green, whom, she said, she had found wandering about in an aimless manner under the trees. ("He has found the back way in!" I thought to myself.)

- "Well!" I said aloud.
- "I hope we shall not incur odium with this childish business!" said Mrs. Peacock with some asperity.
 - "What did you see?" I asked.
- "Nothing, nobody—only Mr. Green and Mrs. Welwyn, and the tea was cold!" she said, still more crossly. "As for Mrs. Greenlaw—."

She stopped suddenly, for we became aware that that lady was advancing to meet us from the opposite direction, looking quite beautiful in a Shakespearian costume—the costume of a court lady, not that of a witch.

"You never came to see me in the Labyrinth!" she said to Mrs. Peacock with her most gracious smile, "and now Mrs. Welwyn has taken my place, and I am having a little rest from 'fortune-telling.'"

Mrs. Peacock hurried off, murmuring something about Harold. And Howard, who came up at that moment with Aunt Jane, proceeded to investigate the Labyrinth with her, remarking that though Aunt Jane did not take much stock in witches, she was

very anxious to get a cup of tea.

Aunt Jane attended the Fête just to show that she was not prejudiced, I suppose. I heard her agreeing with Miss Green that it was an innovation and that a time-honoured bazaar would have been much more suitable for the purpose. However, she was there, and her curiosity having so far got the better of her prejudice, I think she thoroughly enjoyed herself. Much more than Miss Green did, for she was constantly coming round to inquire of me whether I had seen her brother during the last half-hour. She seemed so flustered and cross that at last I was irritated.

The housewives of Edenrise

My reply to her question became mechanical. I told her each time a little more curtly than the last that I had seen him earlier in the day playing croquet with the County-member's daughter.

CHAPTER XV

AUNT JANE'S FORTUNE

"How pleasant it is to have money, heigh ho! How pleasant it is to have money."—Clough.

At the beginning of August Howard and I took the children to the seaside, and all the information I received about our neighbours for six weeks was from Aunt Jane, who, with Uncle John, spent the holidays in our house and garden. The Peacocks were away and so were Mr. and Miss Green, though the former returned to his duties on Sundays. On more than one occasion he had been known to play croquet with Mrs. Greenlaw between service hours, a proceeding of which Aunt Jane strongly disapproved.

We all compared notes as to our holidays when we came home, each one of us, of course, insisting on the superior attractions of the particular place which she had patronized. Mrs. Peacock said there was no air like the air of north Wales; I said there was no sea like the sea of north Devon. Mrs. Manners stood up for the Yorkshire moors and Miss Green enlarged on the joys of bicycling in France. Mrs. Peacock is, I believe, secretly determined to go to Devonshire for her holiday next summer, as I am seriously considering north Wales for ours, but we did not say so to each other—we were too busily engaged in impressing the advantages of the particular health resort we had just visited on our neighbours.

Mrs. Welwyn, who has been at home all the summer, agreed with Mrs. Greenlaw that it was far more restful and pleasant to stay in Edenrise than to take your family away to a crowded health resort in the month of August.

Mr. Welwyn had left her while he took a short holiday, and she had been free to spend her time as she liked, so that, naturally enough, she spent it for the most part with Mrs. Greenlaw.

I heard from Aunt Jane how they sat together under the trees in the garden.

How they worked and read in the heat of the day, playing croquet in the cool of the evening or strolled together in the fields. Their solitude was enlivened from time to time by the presence of Mrs. Greenlaw's brother, in whom Aunt Jane was much interested. She told me that there was a report about that he was a cousin of Mrs. Greenlaw and not her brother. But the news, I found, came from Mrs. Peacock, who had it through "Toute Moralité" and the chemist; and gossip from that source began to weary me, especially when I reflected that the last reports of the approaching advent of Mrs. Manners's eighth child and of the engagement of Mr. Green to the County-member's daughter had proved totally unfounded. I have seen nothing of the gentleman myself during the whole month I have been back, and I determined to take no notice of the report. The chemist, I know, enjoys particular advantages in the village through the insight afforded him by the doctor into the characters and constitutions of his clients. He knows, for instance, when Mrs. Welwyn is hysterical because Dr. Peacock gives her valerian;

he knows that her children are given sugar and water, or something equally harmless, because their mother is nervous about them; and he knows what is really the matter with Mrs. Smith when Dr. Peacock tells her that she is suffering from dyspepsia. Moreover, he is often consulted independently, and, I have reason to believe, he gives his opinion gratuitously on subjects ranging from burns and scars to delicate domestic difficulties between mistresses and servants—possibly even between husbands and wives. But I do not think he should retail everything he knows to the credulous "Toute Moralité," and I begin to wish that Mrs. Peacock had let her go when she gave notice the other day, though I do not agree with Howard that she has forgotten her own language and is unable to teach any other!

In fact, I am persuaded that Dick and Amabelle are getting on very well with her. Dick said the piece which he ought to have recited at the entertainment really very nicely, and only yesterday I heard him call Amabelle "Crapaud! diable! Fléau de la maison!" with an excellent French accent,

while Amabelle replied, with a funny little foreign shrug of her shoulders, "Comme tu es bête, mon frère!"

But though they are happy enough at their lessons I have not yet accustomed myself to the unearthly silence that reigns in the house in the mornings, when I am dusting and tidying and doing the thousand nothings which fall to the housewife's lot, and to which I have always found the children such a serious hindrance.

My mind latterly has often reverted to Aunt Jane and to childless women in general.

When I came down to breakfast this morning Howard was already at the table reading his letters.

"What do you think has happened?" he exclaimed as I came into the room.

"Is it good news?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Then that miserable war is at an end."

"Not a bit of it. Guess again."

"I hate guessing, and I might go on forever," I said crossly. "I never could guess anything!"

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"Very well, then, I will tell you," he said, beaming all over. "Uncle James is dead."

"And left you a legacy?" I inquired.

"Five hundred—and five hundred will be handy enough to us—but Aunt Jane will have at least seven hundred pounds a year. What do you think of that?"

"O Howard!" I said. The tears came welling into my eyes, and I turned my head away, for somehow it struck me as so pathetic that Aunt Jane should have so much money now when she had lost her keen desire for it, and had succeeded, after years of struggle, in bringing her requirements down to suit her limited means.

Howard looked curiously at me. I felt it, though my face was turned away from him.

"This is the best piece of news I have heard for many a long day, and I do believe you are crying, Catherine," he said.

"I am not crying, and you never seem to understand me, Howard," I said, letting a tear fall into my coffee-cup.

"No one ever could understand you, dear," he said gently; "I am sure you will

always remain an interesting enigma to me as long as you live."

"The closer one gets to a person the more incomprehensible he becomes," I began, openly drying my eyes with my hand-kerchief.

"She becomes," Howard corrected.
"You have always understood me well enough, but then I am so simple!"

"You are," I said cheerfully, inwardly delighted at being called an "enigma." "But it is too early in the morning to talk such nonsense. I shall get ready and walk to the station with you, and then go on and see Aunt Jane. I quite thought your Uncle James would have lived for ever."

"I certainly thought he would outlive 'Aunt Jane," said Howard.

When I had left him at the station I walked very slowly on towards the dreary little row of houses in one of which Aunt Jane lives. Her house is called "Sunny Bank," presumably because there is no bank and the windows face the north. In every house in the row the front door is squeezed between two swelling bow-windows, in which are displayed plants or or-

naments, their best sides carefully turned towards the street, while cheap muslin curtains rejoice the eyes of the passer and impress upon him the gentility of the inhabitants.

Aunt Jane's window-curtains are always spotless, her plants well tended, and her doorstep immaculate. I entered the house expecting to find her bustling about as usual, attending to her household duties—making beds, baking bread, or ironing lace—for she has a wholesome contempt for the mistress of a house who reads books or amuses herself by cultivating her mind of a morning. Such things may come later, when the real business of the day is done.

Extraordinary circumstances, however, call for a peculiar line of conduct, and Aunt Jane has a high standard of how one should behave on special occasions. I found her now sitting in her best parlour, neatly dressed in black, the family Bible open on a table in front of her, and a clean pocket-handkerchief resting upon it. She was not making use of either, but was apparently plunged in thought, calculating,

arranging and rearranging the laying out of seven hundred pounds a year.

She greeted me most affectionately, her usual manner a little toned down by a decent sadness, though she was too honest to express much grief for the death of a brother who had treated her with little consideration when alive.

"He has always been a good, kind brother to me," she said without any enthusiasm, when I referred to his death and the change in her fortunes.

"Of course he has, Aunt Jane," I said, knowing that his kindness had consisted in an occasional cheque and a letter in which disparaging allusions were made to Uncle John.

"I suppose you will be going to the funeral?" I said.

"Certainly, my dear. He was my only brother, and I should like to show him every respect. I shall have a black paramatta and a crape bonnet, and I think I shall take the sequins off my silk mantle." She sighed as she went on. "Sequins are a great improvement and very fashionable, but I do not think they are 'à pro-

pos' for such an occasion. What do you think?"

I had been wondering what "paramatta" was, but did not wish to expose my ignorance, so I said:

"I think with paramatta they are considered quite deep mourning, and I am almost sure I have seen widows wearing them. Certainly they are worn at funerals."

"I am afraid you are mistaken, my dear, but I shall not decide finally until I have consulted my neighbour, Mrs. Doidge, who has lost several brothers and will know exactly what is suitable. John is not the least bit of good in such matters. When I asked him he said: 'I am sure you look very nice in that mantle, my dear; I have always thought so,' and if I were to press the matter I know he would say, 'After all, black is black,' or some such ignorant thing as that."

Aunt Jane's eyes twinkled, but she quickly remembered herself, and resumed her expression of decent sadness.

"Where is Uncle John?" I asked.

"Upstairs, my dear. I told him he ought to be down here ready to receive any

one who might call, but you know what men are!"

"I will go up and see him," I said, and I ran up the stairs and knocked at the door of his room. It was locked, and I heard his voice from behind it, saying:

"I am busy and cannot see any one just

at present."

"I am sure you will see me for a moment," I said coaxingly; "I promise not to keep you longer, Uncle John."

"Is it you, Catherine?" he said, opening the door a very little way, and peering anxiously out at me with his mild blue

eyes.

"I have come to congratulate you, Uncle John," I said, embracing him with unusual fervour.

"It is very kind of you, I'm sure, my dear," he said, keeping his forefinger between the leaves of the Vicar of Wakefield, which he had been studying when I came in.

"Your aunt is a remarkable woman, and well deserves her good fortune," he went on, beginning to walk up and down the room. "Just now she is exercised about

her attire for the funeral, and you will be of great use to her, my dear. Women are so clever about such things."

I smiled, and he went on a little inco-

herently:

"It is a difficult world to live in, a very difficult world! Good fortune generally comes too late if it comes at all. But this will serve to smooth our passage to the grave. Your aunt is a remarkable woman, a very remarkable woman. I have always realized that, and I have always tried to cultivate the attitude of mind of the Vicar of Wakefield—with but little success, I fear. His philosophical calm is not easy to acquire. Good-bye, my dear, and thank you for coming. You will be a great comfort to your aunt, I am sure."

He opened his book, and I left him to resume his study, wondering as I went down the stairs that such a mild person as Uncle John should appear to resent the posthumous interference of his brother-in-law.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs a familiar voice fell upon my ear.

"I am sure, my dear Mrs. Hastings, we must all feel for you in your sad bereavement. Still, we cannot but feel gratified—"

Mr. Green had called to condole, and he did it uncommonly well, with just that judicious admixture of congratulation which the circumstances warranted.

Aunt Jane's behaviour was equally admirable, her remarks in excellent taste and quite to the point, though I knew that her mind was dwelling on sequins and paramatta, and she was anxiously awaiting the curate's departure that she might consult her neighbour Mrs. Doidge, whose head was visible from time to time above the dividing fence, behind which she was watching her opportunity to pay an uninterrupted call of sympathy.

"Do you think sequins suitable with paramatta?" I asked Howard when he came home in the evening. "And if so, should you wear them at a funeral?"

"Oh, don't ask me riddles," he answered impatiently. "Write to the Queen or ask Mrs. Peacock."

CHAPTER XVI

A REVELATION

"Diogenes, being asked whether it was better to marry or not, replied, 'Whichever you do you will regret it."

THE weather, which held up bravely during the early autumn, broke up about the middle of October, and we have had uninterrupted wet weather for almost a week. There has been no temptation to go out, and I have busied myself indoors, so that I have seen nothing of Mrs. Greenlaw and hardly anything of my other neighbours. day morning, however, though it still rained, I was surprised by an early visit from Mrs. Peacock. Morning visits, except under very exceptional circumstances, are unheard of in Edenrise, it being an understood thing that every housewife is absorbed in her domestic duties until after lunch-time. Therefore it was not with out serious misgivings that I entered the

drawing-room and encountered Mrs. Peacock.

My fear that some accident had happened to Dick or Amabelle and she had come to break the news to me was quickly set at rest, for Mrs. Peacock, who showed unusual signs of excitement, began abruptly:

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Howard-Jones, have you seen the newspaper this morning?"

"No," I said; "I generally leave it to Howard to tell me the news in the evenings, and he has been away for a day or so at his uncle's funeral. What has hap-

pened?"

"I felt I must come and tell you! I expected you would know nothing of it—and I am sure I should never have believed it possible, though, as you are well aware, I have always suspected her!" Mrs. Peacock said mysteriously as she produced a newspaper from under her cloak. "Look at that!" and opening it, she pointed angrily to a paragraph in the divorce proceedings, headed:

"A Lady who Acknowledges only the Bond

of Love."

"Read it!" she said, sinking into a chair, apparently quite overcome by her feelings.

My interest was at once aroused, for it flashed into my mind that our charming neighbour must be the lady who "acknowledged only the bond of love," and it was with a certain feeling of pleasure at my own acuteness that I read Mrs. Greenlaw's name, and saw that her house and garden, as well as the visits of the gentleman we had accepted as her brother, were carefully described. The pleasure was, however, quickly succeeded by righteous indignation, and I began to understand Mrs. Peacock's excitement and her wrath, with which triumph at the exposure of her enemy had hardly had time to mingle. She was incensed beyond measure by a facetious allusion to the social life of Edenrise in a letter read in court from Mrs. Greenlaw to the co-respondent, in which she described the inhabitants of our highly esteemed village as consisting of "the old-fashioned sittinghen kind of woman, their bald and highly respectable husbands, enlivened by one milk-and-water curate."

"Infamous! the effrontery of the woman!" muttered Mrs. Peacock.

"Laughter in court," I read with rising anger.

"Atrocious! inexcusable!" gasped Mrs. Peacock.

"Abominable and ungrateful!" I echoed. "How dare she call us the 'sitting-hen kind of woman!'"

"How dare she call our husbands 'bald and highly respectable'!" said Mrs. Peacock. "It is most insulting."

I went on reading the case. The letter named the day on which she would expect the co-respondent, and a letter signed "Your devoted Alfred" proved that he had accepted the invitation.

Then Mrs. Greenlaw's parlour-maid, Sparks, was called as a witness, and having proved the visits of the gentleman in question, she went on to explain the affectionate terms in which he stood to the lady. She (Sparks) had seen him more than once hold Mrs. Greenlaw's hand longer than is usual in shaking hands, she had heard him call her "Honora," and she was prepared to swear that they had remained in a room

alone together—often for hours at a time. She had heard Mrs. Greenlaw say that she refused to acknowledge any bond but the bond of love!

"I knew something would happen after the way in which she went on in the Labyrinth, but I never thought it would be so bad as this!" said Mrs. Peacock, making a laudable effort to speak more in sorrow than in anger. "And Sparks! To think of Sparks allowing herself to be mixed up in such a disgraceful affair! That woman has simply made a tool of her; and she was such a respectable girl before she went into her service!"

Poor Mrs. Peacock! It was a sad blow to her that a servant who had been in her employ should appear as a witness in a divorce court, and she had always resented the fact that Mrs. Greenlaw had taken her and made a confidential servant of her when she had had such trouble with the girl.

I have known a lasting coldness arise between fast friends from this cause alone, and I have been amused to notice that the lady who had taken the servant with an unsatisfactory character, could never resist the temptation of extolling her virtues to her former mistress. I do not think Mrs. Greenlaw had been guilty of this indiscretion, but there is no doubt that the fact that she found Sparks a most desirable servant, had served to widen the breach and make Mrs. Peacock much more suspicious of her than she would otherwise have been.

"To think that we should have been almost on intimate terms with a woman who appears as the respondent—as the guilty party—in a divorce case!" ejaculated Mrs. Peacock. "I shall always be thankful now that I got rid of Sparks when I did."

With my usual self-restraint I did not remind Mrs. Peacock that the girl had left her because of some of Harold's little pleasantries. I only said, smiling:

"If you had kept her she could not have

appeared as a witness in this case."

"How can I tell that!" said Mrs. Peacock. "A girl who will sit at the green-grocer's when she is supposed to be bicycling for her health is quite capable of going and gossiping with the servants of a woman like Mrs. Greenlaw. And then how

can we tell what might or might not have happened?"

"Well, it is a mercy we are not all drawn into the business," I said soothingly. "What should you have done if you had been called as a witness, Mrs. Peacock?"

Mrs. Peacock coloured up and became quite incoherent.

"I—I should have fainted! I should have refused to appear! I should never have smiled again! Nothing would have induced me to go into court—into a divorce court!"

"I am glad Mr. Green has nothing to do with it," I remarked thoughtfully.

"It is not his fault that he hasn't, and I warned his sister of his danger long ago," said Mrs. Peacock, brightening.

I glanced again at the newspaper, and remarked the date of the letters quoted.

"Mrs. Greenlaw's letters were written months ago, when she first came, so that it gives her first impressions only," I said.

"We have no reason to suppose that she modified them! And what decent person would have such first impressions! Or express them if she had!" said Mrs. Peacock indignantly. "I always said red hair indicated a designing mind, and I cannot quite forgive you for persuading me to call upon her."

I was roused by this, and said quite angrily:

"O Mrs. Peacock, you know perfectly well it was Mr. Green who spoke of her as 'an injured lady,' and begged us all to treat her in a neighbourly manner! I did nothing in the matter. Nothing whatever! You were the very first to call upon her!"

"Well, I wash my hands of Mr. Green—and of the whole affair," said Mrs. Peacock, rising. "Mademoiselle said a long time ago that that man, the co-respondent, was not her brother, and I never did like the look of him!"

"I always thought 'Toute Moralité' a very intelligent woman," I said, gladly turning the conversation into a fresh channel.

"There's not the least doubt about that, and if she marries the chemist, which she certainly will do, she will still be able to teach the children. I have arranged all that in my own mind, and I will see that he

does marry her!" said Mrs. Peacock firmly, sitting down again.

"She will teach them French and gossip in all its branches," I said under my breath, and then remarked aloud, "I suppose Mrs. Greenlaw will hardly come back here?"

"Let her come if she dares, after the manner in which she has ridiculed us!" And Mrs. Peacock looked so dangerous that I was afraid to say what I felt, which was that Edenrise would be sadly dull without our fascinating neighbour—without any one to criticise or be jealous of—without her golden hair, her winning smile and ready compliment. Her departure will, I know, leave a blank which Mrs. Peacock, with the best intentions in the world, will never be able to fill.

By the end of the day Edenrise was in a ferment. Every man and woman was in possession of the news and had the unfortunate letter by heart; and some of the children too!

When I looked in at the chemist's—for some beetle-paste—in the afternoon, I learned from "Toute Moralité," who was in

earnest conversation with her middle-aged admirer, that Mrs. Greenlaw was not in Edenrise and was not expected back for some time, though there was as yet no news of her trying to let her house. I learnt also that the curate had gone to visit his maiden aunt, and that Mrs. Welwyn was ill—and "no wonder!"

"Mon Dieu! comme tout cela est shocking!" ejaculated "Toute Moralité."

As she had nothing more interesting to say, I left the shop with Miss Green, who had come in to purchase a cake of carbolic soap, with which, I suppose, she intended to wash her hands of Mrs. Greenlaw and all her works.

"A most scandalous affair," she said angrily, "and I am glad that you and your husband, being such near neighbours, are not further mixed up in it."

"We are much too cautious. But your brother? He was so very intimate with Mrs. Greenlaw," I said maliciously.

"Oh, not at all. I never considered him to be really intimate with her. He spent some time in playing croquet with her, it is true, but then he is so fond of the game. Next summer he will be able to play with the Manners; they have just got a set and are having their lawn levelled, and Mrs. Manners will see that they never play when the grass is wet."

"Capital," I replied. "He would badly miss not being able to play if Mrs. Green-

law should not come back."

"Come back!" Miss Green said indignantly. "She would never dare to show herself here again!'

"Perhaps not. No, I suppose she will

hardly come back," I said sadly.

Miss Green was annoyed at my tone, and she went on to make some very scathing remarks, to which I hardly listened. I was thinking all the time what a pity it was that Mr. Green could not marry Mrs. Greenlaw, or some such clever woman, who would twirl him round her finger and very likely make a man of him—if not a bishop!

"Nothing happens as it ought in this

world," I said, sighing.

Miss Green no doubt considered the remark irreverent, but she could not resist the retort:

"In that case, it is not the world that is 230

at fault, but the worldlings." With which trite remark she left me, carrying common sense and carbolic soap with her.

I met no one else in the village, and at the end of the street I turned into the fieldpath, glad to be alone to enjoy the sunshine after rain and to breathe in the pleasant smell of damp earth and decaying leaves.

The path was already in shadow, but the glow of sunlight on the bare hills above me and the golden tints of the beech-trees in the valley were refreshing, and as my eyes rested on the familiar outline of the landscape it pleased me to reflect that there is not a vestige of common sense about Nature! There may be a semblance of order in her methods-no doubt there is; but for sheer bad management and wastefulness no human housekeeper can come near her! We have had enough rain in the past week in Edenrise to last a year all over the country if it had been properly distributed, and as for the animal kingdom, one set of animals exists simply to waste another, while human beings exist no doubt to pervert and misrepresent the animal kingdom.

"No," I corrected myself, "human be-

ings exist to perplex and irritate one another!" And I smiled as I thought of Mrs. Peacock, and Miss Green and of Mrs. Greenlaw and her mysterious doings. But I soon grew serious again when I began to think of the effect all this might have upon Mrs. Welwyn, and to wonder how far she had been in Mrs. Greenlaw's confidence. I wondered if she had known that the brother was in reality a lover, or if the news of the divorce proceedings had come to her with the same shock that it came to us. Naturally enough, I could come to no conclusion, as I have not been in Mrs. Welwyn's confidence lately, or in Mrs. Greenlaw's at any time. And so, putting a curb on my curiosity as best I could, I hurried back to meet Howard, who has been away for nearly a week, attending Uncle James's funeral, winding up his affairs, and arranging matters for Aunt Jane.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. WELWYN'S VIEW OF MRS. GREENLAW.

"The truest joys they seldom prove
Who free from quarrels live.

"Tis the most tender part of love
Each other to forgive."

John, Duke of Buckingham.

Howard was in excellent spirits when he came home. We met with a certain amount of shyness which we always feel after even a short separation, but the children flung themselves upon him and gave him the warmest welcome possible. Dick clung round his neck while Amabelle firmly clasped his knees, and then, when he took them up, they stretched out their arms for me, and we were all enveloped in one general embrace.

"Have you been good children while I have been away?" asked Howard, setting them down on the ground and holding me at arm's length. "Was mother happy all the time?"

"Of course, mother is always happy," said Dick, laughing at the idea of a grown-up person having any troubles, "but she wouldn't let me mind her properly," he went on in rather an aggrieved tone. "She wouldn't let me stay up in the evenings and talk to her like you do, and she made me do my lessons just the same, so I hadn't any time to do anything hardly. I don't call it fair! But I weeded the rose-bed."

"And I helped her dust the drawing-room, and I slept with her and minded her in the nights, and oh, I have been so good!" said Amabelle, beginning to run up and down the room excitedly as she spoke. "And mammy took me to church on Sunday for a treat because I was so good."

"And did you behave nicely?" asked Howard.

"Yes. I stood up when everybody stood up and I hid my eyes when they did, and once—only once—I laughed out loud because Mr. Green looked so funny in his white pinafore, and mother said 'Hush—sh—sh!' and then I was frightened and thought Mr. Green would come down and put me out. But it was all right. He didn't,

'cause he was too busy singing his prayers out of a great book and hadn't no time to come to put little girls out. Mammy says she can't take me again if I laugh. And, daddy," she went on, stopping in front of him and looking up with her solemn brown eyes wide open, "I understood lots of what he was talking about—it was all about that little thing in your stomach, you know—what you call your spirit."

I tried not to laugh, for Amabelle was evidently hurt and surprised when Howard showed signs of amusement.

He suppressed his mirth as well as he could and sent the children off to look for chocolates in his portmanteau.

Then, after some personal inquiries had been made, I said:

"You have heard the news, I suppose?"

"About Mrs. Greenlaw? Oh, yes." He rubbed his hands and smiled. "Edenrise is well rid of her, and so is Greenlaw, I make no doubt."

"He may be," I said, "but Edenrise will be dreadfully dull without her. I don't know how I shall bear it. We shall have

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nobody to gossip about, and then whatever will poor Mrs. Welwyn do?"

"Oh, you must try and see more of her," he said.

"You stupid old thing! As if I could take Mrs. Greenlaw's place in any one's affections! I am not a siren—"

"No, you are a dear, old-fashioned sitting hen!" he said, trying to prevent my replying, after the usual manner of an affectionate husband.

"That's better than being 'bald and respectable,' "I said as soon as I could speak.

A little later I received a message from Mrs. Welwyn asking me to come and see her, and I left Howard rather reluctantly before he had told me half the things he had to tell of Uncle James's funeral, of the strange collection of relations who had attended it, and of Aunt Jane's demeanour as chief mourner and residuary legatee.

When I reached the Welwyns' house Mr. Welwyn opened the door to me, and I noticed that he shook hands quite affectionately.

"Ella is expecting you—it is so kind of you to come," he said.

"Is she ill?" I asked.

"No, only a little excited and upset. She will be so glad to see you."

Mrs. Welwyn was lying on the sofa in her room when I came in. I begged her not to move, and I sat down by her and began to make some perfectly trivial remarks.

"I am so glad to see you," she began, and stopped. "I wanted to see you first, before any one else," she began again, "because—because I know you will understand. You will not be hard on Mrs. Greenlaw when you know all about it—all the facts of the case."

"Did you know about this divorce business?" I asked. "I hope you did."

"Yes, of course I knew. Honora told me everything—except just when it was coming off. She knew it would excite me so if she told me that. But I knew everything else, and I wanted to tell you about it and to explain that that unfortunate letter in the newspapers was written long ago—when she first came—and of course she had no idea, when she wrote it, that it would be

read by any one else but the person to whom it was written."

- "You knew he was not her brother?" I said.
- "Yes," she answered, "I have known it for a long time. But do not misunderstand her. He was devoted to her, it is true, but his visits were simply the visits of a friend, and she made it appear otherwise simply to free herself—and her husband—from an intolerable bond."
 - "Will she marry him now?" I asked.
- "I hardly know. I think myself that she will, though she has dismissed him for the present. But don't you think it was generous of her to take the matter into her own hands and bear all the scandal herself when her husband wanted to marry again?" she asked with eager enthusiasm.

I answered without much fervour, and she went on:

"Of course she wanted to be free too—naturally enough. Why on earth should two people be tied together for life when they do not love each other, especially when they have no children to consider? It is monstrous! Honora made a mistake. It

was dreadful for her—she never could love her husband—but how was she to know? She has suffered enough for her mistake!"

"And so, no doubt, has he," I said very

quietly.

"And to be free she has to go through all this!" Mrs. Welwyn exclaimed. "Promise me you will speak a good word for her when you hear it all discussed?" she pleaded. "Every one will gossip so and be so ready to condemn her! You will be able to tell them that she altered her opinion of us directly she got to know us well, and how sorry she is about that letter. As to her friend—appearances, I know, are against her, and she has made enemies, but she has acted from the best motives. Indeed she has! If you only knew—"

Mrs. Welwyn stopped, and then began

again shyly:

"If you only knew what she has been to me! I have never had such a friend! She is not like other women. She knows so many things, and she can talk about them. If it had not been for her I should never have been able to make it up with Julius—I know I shouldn't."

"You have made it up?" I asked

eagerly.

"I wanted to tell you about that," she answered with a good deal of embarrassment. "You remember how desperate I felt when I talked to you just before Honora came?"

I nodded.

"I thought things were hopeless—quite hopeless—and we never, never could come to any understanding. Then when she came of course I was attracted to her from the very first, and after a little while we began to talk about our private affairs. She told me all about her husband—how unhappy she had been with him—she couldn't love him—she hated him—and yet—and yet somehow all the time she was able to look at things from a man's point of view as well as a woman's. You don't know how it helped me to talk to her and to hear her talk. I don't understand it! She is wonderful! Perfectly wonderful!"

Mrs. Welwyn sat up, her face flushed with enthusiasm.

"She helped you to feel differently about things," I said. "She made it clear

to you that you really could understand and share your husband's feelings?"

"Yes; she laughed when I said I couldn't be of any use to him because I wasn't clever-that I could never understand him. She told me that he was really fond of me. I didn't believe it. I couldn't at first. I told her about the other woman. She explained all that to me. She said it was my fault. Oh, she didn't spare me! She said I had driven him away, and he was ready to give her up if I would be different to him, and of course she was right. You told me what I ought to do—only I couldn't do it. But when she suggested it to me I began to watch Julius, and to think a great deal about him. Only lately, because, you know, I was too much taken up with her at first to want to think about any one else."

"And then?"

"Still I didn't dare to say anything to him. I didn't dare begin. But a few days ago," she went on, "he began himself to talk to me about Honora. He was interested in her, and he was so sympathetic that I told him everything—what she had been

doing and what I felt for her. And then, and then somehow he seemed to see that my feelings towards him had been changing—that I don't only care for her——"

I made a movement of sympathy, and in a moment Mrs. Welwyn's head was on my shoulder and she was saying between her sobs:

"We talked it all out—I—I cannot tell you all that he said—or that I said—it was too painful. He blamed himself even more than I blamed myself. I didn't know how he suffered! It is dreadful how two people can live in two different worlds of feeling like that—be constantly together and yet be like strangers. It can never happen again, I am sure of that. I feel so—so different—so much happier."

A lump rose in my throat.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am," I said, with some little difficulty, for, like many other women, my words, which flow freely enough when my feelings are not particularly engaged, do not come readily on an occasion like this.

Words are not, however, essential. I understood Mrs. Welwyn and she me, and

before I left I had solemnly promised her that I would not be hard upon Mrs. Greenlaw or allow any personal pique to prejudice me against her.

I found Howard anxiously awaiting my return.

"Well?" he said.

I looked at him for a moment without saying anything. My eyes were full of tears.

"Are you crying because Mrs. Greenlaw has succeeded in obtaining her divorce, or because she has gone away from Edenrise, or what?" he asked lightly.

I began to laugh, shutting my eyes sharply to get rid of the tears.

"I had almost forgotten Mrs. Greenlaw. And I am really laughing. It was Mrs. Welwyn who made me cry," I added in my illogical, feminine way.

Howard smiled, a superior smile, and as we talked I tried to lay all the stress I could on Mrs. Welwyn's view of Mrs. Greenlaw and of the part she had played in the development of her ideas.

"I am amazed at Mrs. Welwyn's sim-243 plicity! She is so impressionable that I am sure if I had been in Welwyn's place——"

"You would have acted as he did, I have no doubt! You would have lost your tem-

per," I put in quickly.

"A man with any real affection for his wife," Howard proceeded calmly, "and possessed of ordinary patience and tact—"

"Would still have been a man!" I broke in again, with just a shade of superiority in my tone. "And only a woman—probably only Mrs. Greenlaw—could ever have exercised such a healthy influence over Mrs. Welwyn."

"Oh, I daresay you may be right, and I am sure I am perfectly willing to give the devil his due!" Howard said, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. GREENLAW'S POINT OF VIEW

"Je n'étais point faite pour être femme. Mais dans notre sexe, on n'achette la liberté que par l'esclavage, et il faut commencer par être servante pour devenir sa maitresse un jour."—Rousseau.

A FEW days later we awoke to one of those lovely days that in our climate capricious autumn sometimes vouchsafes us. Damp earth, decaying leaves, and colourless flowers were bathed in a flood of sunshine, and I was tempted to spend the morning in the garden. As I turned up the earth, removing withered plants, and as often as not stirring up and maining in my ardour the bulbs that were to blossom in the spring, I glanced up at the shrouded windows of the empty house next door. My thoughts ran on my fascinating neighbour, and I wondered what manner of person would replace her—or, rather, occupy her house -now she had left Edenrise.

My imagination pictured in her stead a solid British matron revelling in all the conventionalities of life. I fancied myself paying a first call upon her and referring, perhaps too lightly, to the former occupant of the house. I seemed to see her warning finger held up as her husband entered the room, for it is still a fable among us that we matrons must respect the innocence of our husbands, and if we do speak of anything that is not quite proper, they must on no account hear a word of it!

I dismissed the vision and began to wonder whether Aunt Jane and Uncle John might not take the house now they had the money. I thought of Aunt Jane's penetrating eye and of the weak places in my system of housekeeping, and, on the other hand, I thought of the happy mornings I might spend with Uncle John in the garden, for on horticultural matters he has quite decided views of his own, and has given me many really valuable suggestions.

I sighed, and turned my thoughts again to Mrs. Greenlaw.

The scent of violets came to me through

the odour of decaying leaves and brought with it thoughts of spring and of the changing face of nature and of the unvarying puzzles of life, of death, and of love.

"Fortunately for us," I thought, "we housewives have so many obvious cares and duties that we have little time to indulge in fancies."

I roused myself with something of an effort when the children appeared and threw my whole energies into a game with them, for a mother knows how quick children are to recognise and to decline to accept as an equal a grown person who plays half-heartedly. I chased them in to their dinner, and the meal was a little uproarious.

When it was over I was called into the kitchen on some trifling domestic occasion, and on my return both Dick and Amabelle

had disappeared.

I sought for them behind the doors, in cupboards and under beds, remarking in despairing tones as I did so, "Wherever are those children? I shall never, never find them!" for I have learned from experience

that they cannot resist showing themselves as soon as their mother confesses herself outwitted.

They were nowhere in the house, and thinking I heard voices outside, I hastened out and caught sight of them at last in Mrs. Greenlaw's garden, and, to my surprise, I saw that Mrs. Greenlaw herself was there, kneeling upon the ground, an arm thrown round each of them, and I heard Amabelle saying fervently:

"I am so glad you have come back! They said you wasn't coming back no more."

"But I knew you would," said Dick in tones of superiority, "and I said so."

I hesitated a moment, standing screened by the bushes, and then, bending down, I squeezed myself through the gap in the privet hedge and stood, a little dishevelled, on the siren's ground.

She saw me at once and advanced to meet me, the children still hanging about her.

"O Mrs. Howard-Jones, this is kind! I can see from your face that you come as a friend," she said.

- "I hardly know," I said, holding out my hand with rather a doubtful smile.
- "I should so much like a talk with you, if you could spare me half an hour," she said. "May I take the children in and give them some chocolate before we begin to talk?"

"Have you come back to stay?" I asked, as we all went together towards the house.

"No, oh, no! I am afraid Edenrise will hardly appreciate me now. I should not find it such a pleasant place to live in after what has occurred. But please don't think that I intentionally outraged the feelings of the matrons of the place. I did not!"

"You did not spare us," I said a little

stiffly.

We had entered her drawing-room, and Dick and Amabelle stood, their arms about each other's necks, eyeing us curiously, for they had recognised that we had suddenly retired from their world. When they were propitiated each with a box of chocolates, they departed happily enough to their play.

Then Mrs. Greenlaw drew her chair up to the fire and we began to talk, or rather

she began to talk.

"When I came here," she said, "I had no idea whatever of entering into the social life of Edenrise."

"You thought you were burying yourself in the country, I suppose?"

"Just so. Edenrise society was, I assure you, quite a revelation to me, and as I had nothing in particular to do, I allowed myself to be drawn into it. It amused me, it was all so delightfully fresh. Do you remember the children's party at the Peacocks'?"

"You enjoyed it?"

"Immensely! I never enjoyed anything more," she answered. "At the children's parties I had been used to, little starched children were engaged in trying to imitate grown-up people, and they did it very badly. Here the grown-up people imitated the children, and they did it so very well. It was delightful! And then," she went on, "your neighbours were all so amusing! Mrs. Peacock, and Miss Green, and the Manners family, the curate, and the doctor—they all amused me! And I could see that they amused you. And you and your husband—well, I think I afforded

you more amusement than you afforded me!"

She laughed, gazing straight at me.

"Why did you say such unkind things when we afforded you so much innocent amusement?" I asked.

"Oh, you know how misleading first impressions are. And I daresay you can understand the necessity an imaginative person is under to exaggerate such impressions, and to pose a little to one's friends, especially in a letter."

I nodded.

"I regret now that I expressed myself so strongly. I ought to have been more circumspect. Believe me, Mrs. Howard-Jones, if it had not been necessary for my purpose I would not have allowed that letter of mine to appear; though I did not, of course, know it would be printed in the newspapers, or that any one here would ever see it."

"Were there not other letters?" I asked.

"There were certainly others, but this one happened to have a definite date and a definite answer to it. But don't let us talk

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of letters!" she exclaimed, letting her hands fall on her lap and leaning forward to look into the fire. "Language was given us to conceal our thoughts, and writing, there is no doubt, to misrepresent them!"

"What is the use of our talking, then?" I said impatiently.

"I did not mean to be flippant," she said, changing her tone. "I really felt a desire to talk to you and to explain things from my point of view. Perhaps it was weak of me. But I have always thought you such an open-minded woman."

"I really believe I am capable of looking at things from another person's standpoint," I said, feeling slightly flattered.

"That is so rare a gift in a married woman—in a happily-married woman, I mean," Mrs. Greenlaw said brightly.

"I suppose that you will marry your lover now you are free to do so?" I asked, going straight to the point which interested me.

I observed that the word "lover" did not offend her. She made no objection to it, and she evidently had no intention of presenting him to me in the light of a platonic friend.

She looked at me steadily with a slightly contemptuous smile on her lips for a moment before she answered.

"No, I shall not marry him. He belongs to the past. We are not the slaves of the past, and I do not intend to throw away my freedom directly I have obtained it."

"What could have induced you to marry originally?" I could not refrain from say-

ing.

"Oh, that was an error of youth," she replied frankly. "I had not felt my feet. I did not realize my own power, and I wanted so many things—money particularly. In my innocence I thought that to marry was to get them, as well as to be comparatively free from restraint. I did not get what I wanted." She shrugged her shoulders and maintained an expressive silence for a moment.

"Well, don't let us talk of that," I said.

"Then, of course," she went on, taking no notice of my remark, "I was no sooner married than my father died, and I had money at my own disposal—one of 'life's little ironies' again! But one has to buy one's experience in this world. I don't regret mine. It has taught me many things, among others to look round me well, to see where I am going, and to avoid pitfalls of all kinds."

She threw back her head, and the firelight, which was gradually growing more powerful than the light of the dying day, caught and lit up the golden threads of her hair and flickered on the beautiful curve of her throat.

"You regard marriage as a pitfall?" I said.

She nodded.

"But life is so lonely!"

"Marriage does not alter that fact—if it is a fact," she said. "In married life the barriers that are thrown down in one direction are instinctively set up in another. I am repeating some one else's thought, but it is very true, isn't it?"

She looked at me curiously, and I said: "Well, in any case, I could not support life without the companionship which it brings. And, besides, there are times when

one gets near—very near—to complete union and sympathy."

Mrs. Greenlaw moved impatiently.

"What a price for a woman to pay!" she exclaimed. "A lifetime in a coop for moments—mere moments—of sympathy!" She gazed into the fire and added with a half smile on her lips: "Surely one need not pay that price! One can enjoy such moments under the free vault of heaven!"

The word "coop" was an unfortunate one. It reminded me of her letter and the opinion she had expressed in it of the housewives of Edenrise.

"I look at such things from a totally different standpoint," I said stiffly. "I think that a woman can be married and yet retain her freedom."

"Freedom!" said Mrs. Greenlaw scornfully. "'Trusted with a muzzle, enfranchised with a clog!' But a happily-married woman is always biassed. It is impossible for her to keep an open mind on such questions. She thinks that what is good for her —or what she is pleased to call good—is good for all the other women in the world."

I hated her at that moment, for nothing

makes an enlightened married woman so angry as the insinuation that marriage has narrowed her outlook.

"I am not biassed," I said hotly. "I see your point of view clearly enough, and there is doubtless a good deal to be said for it; but then this talk of freedom! What does it amount to? You know you would give it up to-morrow for anything that seemed to you to be more desirable at the moment!"

"Very possibly," she said quite imperturbably, "but to-day I value what I call my freedom very highly, and I am not going to give it up, or marry the man who has helped me to obtain it, just because it is what nine out of ten women would do under the circumstances. Why should I tie myself? My business in life—and yours, too, as a woman—is to be loved and admired. We educate and benefit the world by existing for that purpose, and the wider our sphere of influence, the better for the community, isn't it?"

"I grant you that love and admiration are meat and drink to a woman—" I began.

"Yes, and every one requires a change of diet," she interposed quickly. "I cannot conceive of anything more sating than a constant diet of legal love— Even if one could imagine such a thing!" she added, laughing.

"One cannot expect to get everything and give nothing in this world," I said.

"But the wise woman takes all she can and gives only when it is necessary."

I was going to speak, but she stopped me by saying:

"I know all your arguments! I have heard them again and again. But you do not get the opportunity of hearing my side of the question frankly stated every day of the week. People are too timid and too much afraid of one another to say what they really think. Most men regard life as I do, in the light of a game, and they know that to play it too seriously is a weakness; but instead of saying so plainly they think it wise to speak of life as 'a pilgrimage,' 'a vale of tears,' or a 'prison-house.' They talk of helping their fellow-pilgrims over stones when all the while they are studying their movements only to seize the oppor-

tunity of getting ahead of them. Their greatest delight is to show their skill in the game. Why not be frank? Life is a game, and a very good game, too—for a woman as well as for a man—if she only knows how to play it properly. It is a pity that most women seem born with the idea that it is their business in life to sit down and suffer, and to sit down and suffer just where a blind providence has seen fit to place them, when they might enjoy themselves, when they might, if they liked, move freely across the board."

"Even women are forced to move more or less, sooner or later," I said.

"Not at Edenrise! Nobody moves or thinks of moving here," she said pleasantly, speaking as though we were entirely agreed on this as on all other subjects. "At one time I thought that I was inducing a little movement among the players, but I don't flatter myself that I have made any permanent impression."

She laughed, as at a pleasant recollection.

"I think that you did induce Mrs. Welwyn to move, in any case," I said thoughtfully, "and I congratulate you. I wonder what made you use your influence to make her move in that direction? She was ready, I am sure, to adopt your views of love and marriage, to leave her husband or to take any rash step that you might have seriously suggested to her. And yet she says that if it had not been for you she would never have made it up with her husband. I don't understand it. It seems to me so inconsistent."

"Not a bit," Mrs. Greenlaw said, smiling. "I am not a professional moralist, and I do not believe that what is right for one person is right for all. I was born I suppose with a certain amount of artistic sense, and I always feel balked of part of my enjoyment of life if the children are not happy. Ella is only a child, and you can hardly suppose that I should talk to her as I talk to you."

"Why not?" I said.

She shrugged her shoulders as she answered:

"Milk for babes—Strong meat for women like you and me— Ella's affections were running to waste—and she is one of

those people who can so easily be made happy."

"But who suffer dreadfully when they

do suffer," I said.

"Yes, when other people haven't the sense to understand them, or the patience to explain things to them.—I am really sorry to leave Edenrise," she said, suddenly changing the subject, "and I am glad to have had a talk with you. You and I understand each other so well!" She put her hand on my knee for a moment quite affectionately.

I let it rest there and I said little or nothing. No burning indignation filled my soul and none of the stock moral phrases and conventional warnings with which I am familiar seemed to me in the least appropriate to Mrs. Greenlaw's case. Her attitude towards life appeared to me to be a perfectly logical one. I felt that she had taken her own measure and taken it more accurately than she had taken mine. As the wife of a dull man it is evident she could be neither happy nor successful, while, independent and untrammelled, she is capable of enjoying her own life, and

will doubtless give a great deal of pleasure to other people. My fatal facility for seeing things from another person's point of view entirely prevented me from arguing with her, and I did not try to point out to her the error of her ways.

"I hope you will find other people and other places as entertaining as you have

found Edenrise," I said.

"I hope I may. I am going to travel for the present, and I have no doubt that I shall always look back with pleasure at the few months I have spent among the housewives of Edenrise. I hope I may hear of you again."

"I can only hope that my next neighbour will afford me as much instruction and amusement as you have done," I said

lightly.

We both smiled, and I had just risen to go when Mrs. Welwyn came in. She glanced quickly at Mrs. Greenlaw and then at me before she flung her arms round her friend's neck. Then she turned to me and said impulsively:

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you together! I know you will understand each other so well now you have had a real talk."

"I think we understand each other perfectly," I said as I took my leave of them. "Shall I see you again before you go, Mrs. Greenlaw?"

"I am afraid not. I go to-morrow or next day. I am only here just to pack up my things. I shall leave the house in the agent's hands for him to let furnished, if possible."

Mrs. Welwyn sighed.

I went out by the way I came in, through the window, and as I was closing the casement behind me I took the opportunity of looking back into the room. The firelight made it beautiful with lights and shadows, and as I looked I saw Mrs. Welwyn drop on her knees in front of Mrs. Greenlaw and throw her arms about her waist, and I saw Mrs. Greenlaw's golden head bend down until her cheek rested on Mrs. Welwyn's hair.

I walked slowly back to my own house in a thoughtful mood, and when Howard came home a little later he complained that I was irresponsive and self-absorbed. "A woman exists to be admired," I said, "and if you do not admire her you are depriving her of her due."

"Who could admire such a weather-cock?" said Howard in a bantering tone. "What have you been doing? Reading Ruskin?"

"No; I have been studying Mrs. Greenlaw," I replied. "Her views are not quite the same as Ruskin's, but I think they both hold that the wise woman exacts many things from her lovers—takes everything and gives as little as possible in return."

"Just the views I should have expected Mrs. Greenlaw to hold—only, of course, she would not express them with such clearness and candour," he remarked.

"She did, though."

"To you?" Howard said incredulously.

"Yes, to me," I answered. "I have spent the afternoon with her, and she did me the honour to treat me as an equal and explain her views of life quite clearly. Life, she says, is a game which a woman plays for her own amusement, and she must on no account play it too seriously. I think myself that it might be quite a pleas-

ant game if one could look at it in that light and if one only knew how to play it properly."

"It isn't such a bad game even if one plays it seriously," Howard said cheerfully.

I find his optimism very irritating at times. It irritated me now.

"The worst of it is that one gets so interested in other people's moves that one forgets to play oneself," I said dismally, "and then the players one is most interested in move on and leave one behind. I have been tremendously interested in Mrs. Greenlaw's game, and now she is gone, and who is there left?"

"I am left," he said, patting his chest in a self-satisfied manner.

"Oh, you!" I said impatiently.

"But is Mrs. Greenlaw really gone?" he asked. "I thought she had just come back."

"Well, she goes to-morrow or next day."

"I ask because I saw Peacock at her door as I came by, and that made me think that she must be there," he remarked.

"He must be calling to say good-bye—or is it a professional visit? I wonder if Mrs. Peacock knows!" I said, brightening at once, and settling myself down for a thorough gossip.

Howard (like most men, I believe) is an excellent person to gossip with. He is just as interested in his neighbours' affairs as a woman could be, but he looks at things from a somewhat different point of view, and I would rather have a good gossip with him than with any woman of my acquaintance.

"You have always avoided Mrs. Greenlaw because you were afraid of being fascinated by her," I said in the course of our talk. "It was quite clear to me all the time."

"I suppose you would have liked me to succumb to her fascinations?"

"I don't think any the better of you for avoiding her so carefully," I replied.

"Well, I will go in and say good-bye to her now if you wish it," he said, rising from his chair. "I daresay Peacock is gone by this time."

"No, I don't want you to go to-night; 265

there are so many things I want to talk to you about," I said, laughing and putting my hands on his shoulders with a slight pressure to facilitate his sitting down again.

"Don't you think," I began after a brief silence, "that it is refreshing to see a person like Mrs. Greenlaw, who calmly pursues her own ends, sees what she is aiming at, and has the courage of her convictions? I think she is a much more satisfactory sort of person than I am, for instance."

"Very possibly," Howard said. "I have no doubt you are right, but personally I find that sort of person refreshing to look at through a privet hedge. To live with I prefer a perfectly irrational, easy-going, impressionable person like you."

His remark was, of course, intended to rouse my anger, and it had the desired effect. I tried to shake him.

"Don't ill-treat me, Catherine," he implored, pretending to shrink away from me, but at the same time seizing my hands and holding them firmly in his own. "You must admit that I supply the logic and all

Mrs. Greenlaw's Point of Diew

the solid virtues for the family! Admit it!"

"I will never admit that you supply anything but brute force!" I said, seating myself on the arm of his chair. "But that I am obliged to submit to!"

CHAPTER XIX

A SEWING MEETING AT WHICH THE HOUSE-WIVES OF EDENRISE EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS OF MRS. GREENLAW

"Thus, whether we're on or we're off,
Some witchery seems to await you;
To love you is pleasant enough,
But oh, 'tis delicious to hate you!"
Thomas Moore.

SEWING meetings are a regular institution in Edenrise. As a rule women are much more at their ease—their talk is more spontaneous and unguarded, and their ideas flow more freely when they have needle and thread in their hands. I have always valued these meetings myself, though I have sometimes doubted whether they were of use to any one but the workers. When they were first started we used to make petticoats and such things for the poor of the parish, but as a matter of fact there are no poor in Edenrise, or at any

rate none who are church-goers, and with the spread of modern culture it would seem that even the poor regard flannel petticoats with suspicion, and the one or two old ladies who supported us became so exacting about the herring-boning of seams and the hemming of strings that we decided to throw them over and turn our attention to making shirts and hemming pocket-handkerchiefs for the soldiers in South Africa. Miss Green manages the affair, and we make the shirts of a very cheap material (a penny three farthings the yard), which is warranted not to wash, and is supposed to be discarded when dirty. I must say it often distresses me to see such excellent work wasted on such very poor material, but people like Aunt Jane and "Toute Moralité" will not hear reason.

"What's worth doing at all is worth doing well," Aunt Jane says severely, and her sewing is calculated to stand the wear and tear of generations of soldiers. I imagine her stitching and her buttonholes remaining (a triumph of her system) when every vestige of the cheap shirting has disappeared and the men who wore

the shirts have returned to their native dust!

With the articles we have made, we are invited to send any trifle or trifles which we think will be acceptable to soldiers on active service, and of course we all have very different views on such a subject. Mrs. Greenlaw, whose sewing was in strict accordance with her material, made a pocket in her shirt and put a well-filled cigarette case in it. Miss Green places an improving penny book, or a few leaves from a copy of Wordsworth's Excursion, which she has cut up for the purpose, in the folds of her garment. Mrs. Peacock insists on packs of cards and postage-stamps, Mrs. Manners on woollen comforters and tabloids, Aunt Jane on Testaments and pocketcombs, while I hanker after air-cushions, but substitute cheap packets of stationery from motives of economy.

I like to imagine the surprise and delight of the recipients, and the exchanges which they will effect, bartering cigarettes for tabloids, cards for Testaments, and so on, and what a relief it will afford to the monotony of some isolated blockhouse!

We were sitting round a large table in Mrs. Manners's dining-room this afternoon for the first time since Mrs. Greenlaw's departure from Edenrise and our knowledge of her departure from the narrow path of conventional virtue. For some time the subject was not touched upon. Two sewing-machines clattered noisily, and every now and then one of Mrs. Manners's younger children would come into the room to announce some domestic disaster.

"Please, mother, Jane has sent me to say that she can't boil the water for tea because the boiler has gone and burst."

"Tell her to rake out the kitchen fire and boil the water on the gas-stove," said Mrs. Manners, sewing serenely.

In a few minutes came another child.

"Please, mother, Tiny has tumbled down and torn a great hole in her frock, and her knee is bleeding, and what is she to do?"

"Tell her to change her frock, and Christina will come and see to her knee," said Mrs. Manners, taking a number of pins out of her mouth to make the remark and replacing them as soon as she had made it.

Christina got up and left the room, and then it was that we turned our attention to Mrs. Greenlaw, and as Mrs. Welwyn was not present—we had received a message from her to say that she had gone away for a week with her husband—we dealt with that lady somewhat ruthlessly.

"When I saw that newspaper article headed 'A Lady who Acknowledges only the Bond of Love' I blushed for my sex!" said Mrs. Peacock so loudly that her voice was distinctly audible above the rattle of the sewing-machines and the more subdued voices of the other ladies.

"A loveless marriage leads to sore temptation, and I think until she came here she could have had no really disinterested friends to advise her," said Mrs. Manners, quietly but quite clearly, having placed the last of her pins in her seam.

"If you think that our virtuous example or disinterested advice (which, by the way, she never asked) would be likely to have the least effect on a woman like Mrs. Greenlaw, you are very much mis-

taken. She scoffs unmercifully at us and she makes light of virtue itself," said Mrs. Peacock hotly.

I felt bound to put in a word.

"Mrs. Welwyn, who knew her really well, better than any of us, says she acted from the best motives; that she really had a great regard for us all and never scoffed after she had really begun to know us."

"She came to scoff—and remained to make a dupe of Mrs. Welwyn," said Miss Green in her finely satirical manner.

Aunt Jane, who had been sewing with her usual vigour, now looked up and remarked in her deep voice:

"'Who can find a virtuous woman? for

her price is far above rubies."

"O Aunt Jane," I said flippantly, "I really think we are more virtuous than Solomon's perfect housewife! She made sheets and sold them, whereas we make shirts and give them to the soldiers in South Africa! She dressed herself in 'purple and fine linen,' and burnt her candle all the night. I cannot see much virtue in that. I should like to dress in purple and fine linen!"

"'Strength and honour were her clothing' also," said Miss Green.

"That always reads to me like an afterthought," I said. "Solomon's virtuous woman just followed her own inclinations, and so do we. It is all very fine for us to talk of virtue when it is more than probable that we have never in our lives been tempted to be other than virtuous."

"Our sympathies ought to go out to those who are tempted," said Mrs. Manners, in her charitable way.

Mrs. Peacock looked doubtful, knowing that her sympathies were not quite so elastic. Miss Green shuffled impatiently in her seat, and I did her the justice to believe that, even if she were tempted, she would be quite incapable of breaking the smallest of the commandments.

"Not, of course, that I should uphold Mrs. Greenlaw or ever think of advocating divorce," continued Mrs. Manners. "It appears to me to be an extreme measure, and surely would never be necessary if married people practised ordinary patience and forbearance. In daily life one must learn to give and take, and two people can almost

always get on together if they make up their minds to that."

"Any one in this world could get on with Mrs. Manners," I thought to myself.

"But it is so easy for the young, ignorant as they are of the ways of the world, and led away and confused by all sorts of feelings, to make a wrong choice," I said aloud. "It is a marvel to me that there are as many happy marriages as there are."

"The point is that they should not be led away by their feelings," said Miss Green. "They should use their reason, and then we should not hear so much of these

unhappy marriages."

"I should be loath to admit that I had made such a serious mistake as to marry the wrong person," said Mrs. Peacock with decision, "and if I did go so far as to admit it to myself, you would never hear me admit it in a court of law. Nor can I imagine myself retaining any feelings of friendship for a woman who has so lost all sense of propriety as to allow herself to appear the guilty party in a Divorce suit!"

"Did Mrs. Greenlaw appear in per-

son?" asked Mrs. Manners.

"I believe not. Even Mrs. Greenlaw could hardly go so far as that, I should think!" Mrs. Peacock said, putting her scissors down on the table with a force that made me jump. "To allow her letters to be read was going far enough in all conscience! Such letters, too! And to insist on a respectable girl like Sparks giving evidence in the case! Why, I could cry when I think of it all! And when I consider that we have been held up to ridicule in a Divorce Court—"

Mrs. Peacock broke off in the midst of her sentence, quite overcome.

Mrs. Manners glanced at Christina, who had just come back, and evidently desiring on her account to keep the conversation in a safe channel, said:

"There is no doubt that it is good for us all to see different sorts of people with different views of life now and then, even though their views may be erroneous."

"Just so," I said; "and I am sure Mrs. Greenlaw's example would not be likely to do us any harm."

"You forget Mrs. Welwyn, who is so very impressionable," said Miss Green.

"I have never been easy in my mind since the affair of the Labyrinth," remarked Mrs. Peacock. "I said at the time that no good would come of it, and looking back, I see how very blind we have all been. But then, how could we help being taken in by the woman? How could we know what sort of person she was? She was so ladylike and dressed with such taste! People like that ought never to be allowed to settle in a respectable place!"

"The harm she might have done in some places!" ejaculated Miss Green.

"We may congratulate ourselves that we are quite uncontaminated," I said,

with just a shade of sarcasm in my tone.

"I assure you," Mrs. Peacock went on,
"if Dr. Peacock had suspected for a moment the sort of woman she was he would
not have visited her professionally even!
He was quite upset and could hardly believe his eyes when he read it all in the
newspaper!"

"I wonder who will take the house now?" said Mrs. Manners with an admi-

rable assumption of interest.

Her efforts to turn the conversation were unsuccessful.

"To pass that man off as her brother!" Mrs. Peacock proceeded, entirely forgetting her sewing. "Fortunately she never introduced him to me and I never could bear the look of him! The sound of his voice was enough for me!"

"I don't think as a matter of fact she introduced him to any of us as her brother," I said, remembering my promise to Mrs. Welwyn.

"That was just her artfulness," retorted Mrs. Peacock.

"Mrs. Welwyn says he simply acted the part of a devoted friend, and not that of a lover at all," said Mrs. Manners in a penetrating whisper, her eye still on Christina.

"Mrs. Welwyn will believe anything!"
Mrs. Peacock remarked scornfully. "Of
course she will marry him now! She is
bound to marry him."

"I rather doubt it," I said carelessly.

"It wouldn't surprise me if he declined to marry her," Mrs. Peacock said in the same scornful tone.

"One must make allowances for people," Mrs. Manners said, and I think that for the moment she had entirely forgotten the presence of Christina. "One must make allowances, especially for women who are unhappily married, as Mrs. Greenlaw was. We, situated as we are, can hardly imagine what she must have gone through."

"If she made a faux-pas she should have stood by her guns. I don't approve of her conduct. Never leave a sinking ship!" Aunt Jane said, shaking her head. "Nothing justifies her conduct."

"The only thing that troubles me is the influence she has had over Mrs. Welwyn," Miss Green remarked in a tragic tone. "Do you know she told me herself that she declined to hear a word said against Mrs. Greenlaw—that she considered her conduct perfectly natural and justifiable under the circumstances, and that she hoped to keep her friendship as long as she lived, whatever happened! I was so taken aback I could hardly say a word! Fortunately, no one else would be likely to be influenced in the same way, and we are quite above being

hurt at having opprobrious epithets hurled at us from a Divorce Court."

"But it was so unjust!" remarked Mrs. Peacock, "and so ungrateful, and it shows such an utter lack of insight on her part."

"I never gave her credit for much insight into character," said Miss Green. "There is nothing that leads a person so much astray as a little superficial cleverness, such as Mrs. Greenlaw possessed."

Aunt Jane folded up her work and, tapping her thimble on the table, remarked in her most decided manner:

"I do not trouble about what she thought of us; that is not to the point. And her conduct and opinions do not concern us except in so far as they were opposed to a law by which we are all bound. Death alone can break the marriage bond in my opinion, and in the opinion of the Church. And Divorce is a thing that we women should set our faces against."

Having expressed herself in this lucid manner, Aunt Jane took up a fresh piece of work and began to sew with renewed energy. Her views did not irritate me in the least, but it did irritate me to hear the lofty tone which Miss Green and Mrs. Peacock adopted about the whole affair.

Mrs. Manners and I sat silently listening, while they described Edenrise as having been innocent as the Garden of Eden before the Fall until the advent of Mrs. Greenlaw, the serpent. And now! Well, now it might never be able to regain its selfrespect and native purity, after having been so dragged in the mire! It was deplorable! We were, it was true, still in possession of our garden, but, having eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, we knew that we were good and she was evil, and we were able to realize how terribly she had defiled our paradise. They talked as though Mrs. Greenlaw had come to Edenrise with the sole object of ruining our morals and wrecking our happiness, and it was only our extraordinary virtue which had preserved us from contamination.

"I really think," I burst out at last, "that Mrs. Greenlaw has done us nothing but good! She has kept us amused during the whole summer and supplied us with abundant food for gossip. And now we know more about her, our feeling of su-

periority is so pleasant that I am sure we ought to be full of gratitude towards her."

Mrs. Peacock looked pityingly at me.

"Besides," I went on more seriously,
"do you think we should any of us be so
ready to condemn a man who acted as she
has done? I cannot see why we women
need be so eager to cast a stone at one of our
own sex who allows herself the same latitude as a man would do under the circumstances. Is it because we are so conscious
of our own weakness, that we cannot take a
broader view of such a matter?"

"Why do we not take a higher point of view altogether and insist upon the same code of morals for men as for women?" said Miss Green in an aggressive manner.

There was a dead silence.

I looked at her pityingly, and not without some of the contempt which married women feel for the spinster who airs her views on such subjects, but I did not trust myself to reply, and in the awkward pause which followed every one made a great pretence of being absorbed in their work, while the clatter of the sewing-machines only

seemed to make the silence more oppressive.

It was at this well-timed moment that Mr. Green made his appearance, and any general discussion of broader views on social subjects, or of personal views of Mrs. Greenlaw's particular actions, became not

only unsuitable, but impossible.

We welcomed him with unwonted effusion, and there was, I thought, a little less assurance in his manner of greeting us, for though he shook hands after his usual intimate fashion, he made none of his stock remarks about the fair sex and his intrusion, the crow among the doves, and so on. And after a few moments he crossed over to where Christina Manners was working one of the sewing-machines and began meekly turning the handle for her. Christina looked up with a smile, and I saw the same serene and truthful expression in her eyes that I have so often admired in her mother's. I observed that Miss Green and Mrs. Manners watched them for a moment, and then interchanged glances.

Meanwhile I was thinking of Mrs. Greenlaw and the curate walking in the

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field of buttercups, and I seemed to hear again her cheerful voice saying to him, "Love comes to us in various forms."

I wondered idly if this would be the final form, and I was so busy with my own thoughts that I hardly noticed that the sewing-machines had been stopped and that Mr. Green had begun to read aloud a passage from Sir Thomas Browne (an author, his sister had succeeded in introducing to our notice because the rest of the meeting was divided between the Sorrows of Satan and Eleanor, and several of us had a hazy notion that he had written Rab and his Friends). Miss Green had recommended him most highly, assuring us he was a most suitable author for such occasions, because it did not matter where one began or where one left off.

She proved to be right in this case. It mattered to us very little indeed, for as soon as we realized that he was not what we considered a humorist, we entirely ceased to listen! To-day, however, my wandering attention was recalled by words which I thought for the moment Mr. Green was speaking to us in his own person.

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A Sewing Peeting

"'No man can justly censure or condemn another," he read in his sonorous voice, "'because, indeed, no man truly knows another. This I perceive in myselfe, for I am in the dark to all the world, and my nearest friends behold mee but in a cloud. . . . Further, no man can judge another because no man knowes himself."

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THE END

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